Commentary
December 2005

Who Is Lying About Iraq?
Norman Podhoretz

The Storm Over Katrina
Wilfred M. McClay

Europe's "Good Jews"
Emanuele Ottolenghi

The First Genocide of the 20th Century?
Guenter Lewy

Forgetting Edmund Wilson
Joseph Epstein

Sutzkever's Ascent—A Memoir
David G. Roskies

This Is Your Brain on Nanobots
Kevin Shapiro

Journalism, Hollywood-Style
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
Hillel Halkin • Dan Seligman • Alex Alexiev
Steven C. Munson • Sam Schulman

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE • $4.50/$6.50 CANADA • VOLUME 120 • NUMBER 5

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MINIMIZE YOUR TAXES.
MAXIMIZE YOUR CHARITABLE IMPACT.

With DonorsTrust, you have even more options than you might imagine.

For instance, you don't have to make hasty charitable decisions to meet the December 31 deadline. When you open a donor-advised account with DonorsTrust, you immediately get the highest charitable tax deduction allowed by law. If you give appreciated assets, you won't pay any capital gains taxes. Later, as you decide which charitable organizations best fit your philanthropic goals, you can request disbursements from your account.

Our mission at DonorsTrust is to support only those public charities that promote liberty through limited government, personal responsibility, and free enterprise. If that reflects your intent as a donor, you won't find a more reliable ally. "Trust" isn't just part of our name; it's our commitment to respect your charitable intent.

Ask us about our wide variety of funds and foundation-style services. They're all designed to give you convenient, flexible options for reducing your taxes while defending America's priceless liberty.

Smart giving.
Convenient giving.
Principled giving.

For more details, visit our Web site or call us for a free informational brochure.

DonorsTrust
BUILDING A LEGACY OF LIBERTY

703.535.3563 | www.donorstrust.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary®

Vol. 120 · December 2005 · No. 5

ARTICLES

27
Who Is Lying About Iraq? ***Norman Podhoretz***
The charge that we were misled into war is not only baseless but itself mendacious.

34
The Storm Over Katrina ***Wilfred M. McClay***
What we think we know about the hurricane and the response to it is largely wrong, and seriously disabling.

42
Europe's "Good Jews" ***Emanuele Ottolenghi***
On the continent, the morally correct way to show concern for the Jewish state is to defame it.

47
The First Genocide of the 20th Century? ***Guenter Lewy***
The extent of Armenian suffering at the hands of the Turks cannot be disputed; the nature of the crime can be.

53
Forgetting Edmund Wilson ***Joseph Epstein***
What, apart from a tawdry personal life, remains of "our last great man of letters"?

59
Sutzkever's Ascent—A Memoir ***David G. Roskies***
In 1967, a young "exilic" student in Tel Aviv learns about war, memory, and a Yiddish poet's devotion to his art.

OBSERVATIONS

64
This Is Your Brain on Nanobots ***Kevin Shapiro***
Examining the latest claims of our most vocal enthusiast of artificial intelligence.

69
Journalism, Hollywood-Style ***Terry Teachout***
Two new films take wholly divergent views of the reporter as paragon.

LETTERS

3
Group differences; "Getting Over Oil"; the Zionist Left; Ayn Rand.

BOOKS

73 The Jewish Century by Yuri Slezkine *Hillel Halkin*

78 The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth by Benjamin M. Friedman *Dan Seligman*

81 Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military by Husain Haqqani *Alex Alexiev*

84 Matisse the Master by Hilary Spurling *Steven C. Munson*

86 The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion *Sam Schulman*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor	Neal Kozodoy
Senior Editor	Gabriel Schoenfeld
Managing Editor	Gary Rosen
Assistant Editor	David Billet
Consulting Editor	Adam Wolfson
Editor-at-Large	Norman Podhoretz
Business Director	Sarah M. Stern
Business Associate	Ilya Leyzerzon
Sales Representative	Del Fidanque
Production Manager	Laura A. Shay-Hupé
Special Assistant	Davi Bernstein

COMMENTARY (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) by the American Jewish Committee. EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022. Telephone: (212) 891-1400. Fax: (212) 891-6700. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Letters intended for publication may be edited. Single copy is $4.50; $45 a year, 2 years $79, 3 years $109. Add $11.00 per year for subscriptions to Canada and Mexico, $19.00 for all other foreign destinations. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to COMMENTARY, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Copyright © 2005 by the American Jewish Committee; all rights reserved under International and Pan American Copyright Conventions.

Indexed in *Reader's Guide*, *Book Review Digest*, and elsewhere. U.S. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870. Printed in the U.S.A. All back issues are available in electronic form at www.commentarymagazine.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE:
(800) 829-6270
service@commentarymagazine.com
EDITORIAL INQUIRIES:
editorial@commentarymagazine.com
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:
letters@commentarymagazine.com
ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:
advertising@commentarymagazine.com
WEBSITE: www.commentarymagazine.com

The Commentary Publication Committee

Michael W. Schwartz, *Chairman*
Stanford M. Adelstein
Norman E. Alexander
Daniel R. Benson
Maurice S. Binkow
Howard I. Friedman
Roger Hertog
Morton A. Kornreich
Peter N. Marron
Jay Meltzer
Herman J. Obermayer
Robert L. Pelz
Gordon S. Rosenblum
Gary L. Rosenthal
Michael Saperstein
Nanette Scofield
Henry Sherman
Walter P. Stern
Thomas J. Tisch

A Statement of Aims

In sponsoring COMMENTARY, the American Jewish Committee aims to meet the need for a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues. The opinions and views expressed by COMMENTARY's contributors and editors are their own, and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position. The sponsorship of COMMENTARY by the Committee is in line with its general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights, and to promote Jewish cultural interest and creative achievement in America.

American Jewish Committee
E. Robert Goodkind, *President*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary
December 2005

Letters from Readers

Group Differences

To the Editor:

Charles Murray recommends that we renounce current taboos and forthrightly begin to discuss group characteristics ["The Inequality Taboo," September]. This would be a beginning step, he believes, toward developing more appropriate social policies, one of which would be an end to affirmative action in university admissions.

It is hard to imagine that Mr. Murray is unaware that the world he would like to see today actually existed a century ago. Then, political leaders, university professors, businessmen, writers, and cartoonists were (by modern standards) thoroughly uninhibited about discussing and portraying the presumed group characteristics of women, blacks, American Indians, Jews, the Irish, Italian immigrants, etc. Most of the portrayals tended to be somewhat negative, reflecting the racism, anti-Semitism, and (to a lesser degree) anti-Catholicism of those in influential positions.

Over the course of the 20th century, the children and grandchildren of these bigoted elites learned better manners and acquired better and fairer attitudes toward their fellow citizens, helping to create the United States of today, where open expressions of racial and ethnic prejudice are largely absent from public discourse. This was a good thing, in fact a triumph of the American democratic ideal.

I, for one, want to preserve that gain in civility and social decency, and in order to do so would gladly continue to forgo the dubious pleasures of discussing the relative "vivacity" of Scots and Italians (to borrow one of Mr. Murray's examples) or the other less anodyne group comparisons that have done so much harm in human history.

Peter M. Connolly
Washington, D.C.

To the Editor:

Charles Murray states that since the 1970's there has been a steady convergence in the mean scores of black and white takers of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) academic achievement tests in mathematics and verbal skills—not yet complete convergence, but respectable gains nevertheless, with the prospect of further gains in the future. With respect to IQ tests measuring the "general mental factor" (*g*), however, there has been virtually no significant improvement since the tests first began to be given in the early years of the 20th century. Mr. Murray cites in particular the "backward digit span" test, which measures the test-taker's ability to repeat correctly in reverse order a random sequence of one-digit numbers.

But this raises a big question. If blacks, on average, possess knowledge at roughly equivalent levels to whites, and can perform tasks at such levels as measured by achievement and aptitude tests, what difference does it make that they cannot repeat numbers backward, or do any of the other things *g*-loaded tests measure, as well as whites can?

Barton L. Ingraham
Santa Fe, New Mexico

To the Editor:

I applaud Charles Murray's call for free debate on race and gender, and for a lifting of the taboos of political correctness. But when dealing with such emotionally charged words as "race," "gender," and "intelligence," one must adhere to *scientific* correctness by working with clear, operational definitions. For the most part, Mr. Murray has made a sincere effort to do so, but I have a few objections.

At the beginning of his essay, he places the issues of gender and race differences side-by-side, implying that they are identical. But while gender can be attributed to an XX or XY set of chro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mosomes, race cannot be operationally defined in such a way. Scientific studies of brain development or endocrinology can test hypotheses about the two biological gender groups. Where is the comparable biological underpinning for race? Mr. Murray alludes briefly to statistical "cluster[s] of genetic markers," but what do these really consist of?

Even if the theory of race as a purely social construct is not valid, that would not establish race as a valid biological entity analogous to gender. When Mr. Murray notes that "the average American black is thought to be about 20-percent white" and then says that "to the extent that genes play a role, IQ will vary by racial admixture," it seems that he is assuming some kind of essential biologic "blackness" and "whiteness."

As for intelligence, I do not think Mr. Murray would claim that it is one solitary, operationally definable property. He himself writes that it "really does manifest itself in different ways and with different profiles." There are various cognitive, as well as social and interpersonal, capacities that combine in myriad ways to produce human intelligence. Mr. Murray is correct that *some* of these, like the "general mental factor" (*g*), have been operationally defined and shown to be heavily influenced by genes. What is less clear is the real-life importance of *g* to success in life. How relevant is George W. Bush's or Bill Clinton's "backward digit span" to either man's capacity to lead the free word?

The fact that neither race nor intelligence can be operationally defined does not mean that they should not be discussed; quite the contrary. Mr. Murray has made an important contribution to the debate, particularly in emphasizing data over blind prejudice. Yet when it comes to statements about the relationship between race and intelligence, I suspect he would admit that we still have much to learn.

PETER HEIMAN
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Charles Murray is certainly correct that taboos concerning biogenetic factors in group differences have stifled serious discussion of these matters and helped create an intellectual climate dominated by lies, evasions, and doubletalk. Still, he does not distinguish in his article between biological factors that are genetic in origin and those that have an environmental basis. The reader is left with the impression that all biological differences between races must be genetic in origin.

But we know that human brain development can be greatly influenced by, say, a child's early nutritional environment, both intrauterine and extrauterine, and by the effects of pathogenic diseases. The fact that researchers have found a persistent black-white group difference in things like "backward digit span" tests, brain pH levels, brain glucose metabolism, nerve-conduction velocity, and reaction times certainly establishes the existence of some kinds of black-white brain differences. But one cannot conclude from this research alone the degree to which the differences are the result of genes or environment.

If a significant portion of the racial differences are due to environmental factors, they may be subject to environmental intervention, and hence (contrary to what Mr. Murray suggests) are at least partially tractable. The distinguished British IQ researcher Hans Eysenck, who for many years believed that the black-white IQ difference was mainly genetic, later came to the conclusion that vitamin and nutritional differences probably accounted for much more than he had previously thought. Other researchers, including Roger Masters of Dartmouth, have stressed the harmful effects on brain development of high ambient levels of lead, cadmium, and other heavy metals, and shown racial differences in exposure to such toxins. Even something as seemingly innocuous as the decision to breast-feed or bottle-feed a baby seems to have a significant effect on brain and IQ development, and there are probably racial differences here, too. There is a whole lot in the area of biological makeup that we still do not know.

RUSSELL NIELI
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Kudos to Charles Murray for exclaiming that the emperor of equality wears no clothes. Those who define and police our cultural dogma deny this truth because they have lost sight of the reality and primacy of the spiritual. Only in that realm are we equal with one another. The ability to solve differential equations or to dunk a basketball is not identically distributed among individuals, or across groups. But everyone is equally created in the image of God, and every mortal of normal mind has equal freedom and responsibility to make moral choices.

DANIEL LOVE GLAZER
Northbrook, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

Charles Murray writes that "specific policies based on premises that conflict with scientific truths tend not to work. Often they do harm." If the leaders of the Democratic party had recognized this 40 years ago, they might have avoided the mistakes that have resulted in the present Republican dominance.

In the 60's and 70's, the Democrats tried to eliminate poverty and racial inequality in the United States. Their efforts were well intended. Unfortunately, they were based on two assumptions that Mr. Murray has disproved: that the poor are the same as everyone else, only less fortunate; and that the problems of blacks are ultimately caused by white racism.

Increasingly, capitalism restricts the rewards of economic growth to the very brightest. This is a Democratic issue. But if efforts to alleviate the income gap are to be successful, they will need at least tacitly to acknowledge the reality of genetic inequality and the relationship between intelligence and income. As long as Democrats pretend that genes do not matter, Republicans will get away with the pretense that the only thing that does matter is moral character.

JOHN ENGELMAN
Wilmington, Delaware

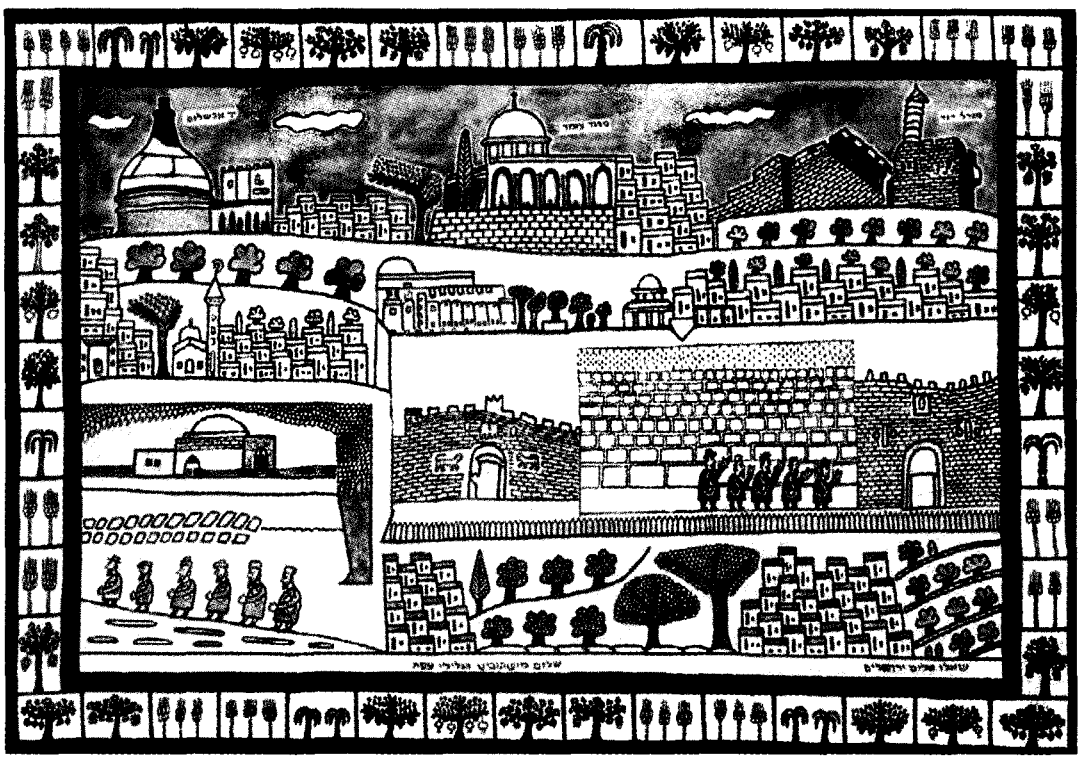
TO THE EDITOR:

Charles Murray writes that "talking about group differences does not require

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

— AN EXCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITY —
FOR COMMENTARY READERS TO ACQUIRE

THE ART OF
SHALOM *of* SAFED



PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM

Lithograph, edition of 300, numbered and signed by hand 29" x 40" $1800
Poster, edition of 1,000, numbered and plate-signed 29" x 40" $400

SHALOM OF SAFED (1887-1980) is Israel's most renowned artist. His paintings, lithographs, and tapestries have been exhibited in prominent galleries all over the United States and Europe and are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the Centre Pompidou (Paris), among many others. He has been the subject of over a dozen one-man museum shows.

Delicate, dramatic, brimming with color, Shalom's work fuses two, often distinct, paths to transcendence: art and faith. His scenes from the history of biblical Israel, like his tender renderings of family life, reflect a master artist's passionate engagement with the sacred texts and customs of Judaism, raising the familiar and the particular to the realm of the universal.

The lithographs and posters pictured here have been made newly available from the final lot of the artist's publisher and personal representative and have been selected by the editors of COMMENTARY for this exclusive offering. The lithographs, numbered and signed by hand, were printed by Atelier Mourlot in Paris in a minimum of 25 colors on Arches paper; the plate-signed posters are printed on Rives paper. Supplies of both are limited.

For seasoned collectors as well as for anyone decorating a home or searching for the perfect holiday gift, here is a rare opportunity to acquire the work of one of the most radiant and inspiring artists of our age.

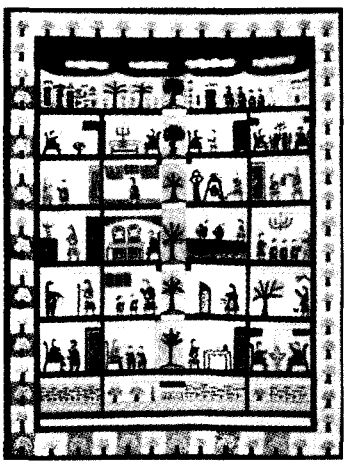
MORE →

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"IN DESIGN AND COLOR, THESE WORKS ARE SMALL MIRACLES OF SOPHISTICATION." — *New York Magazine*

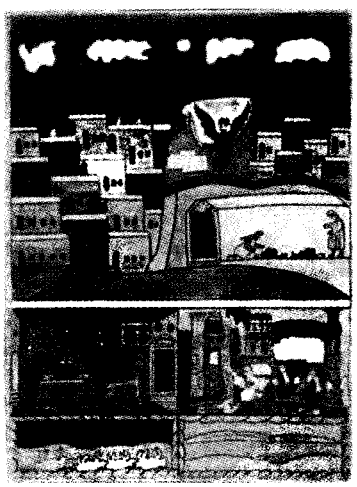
MOSES FOUND IN THE BULRUSHES

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
20" x 14" $600



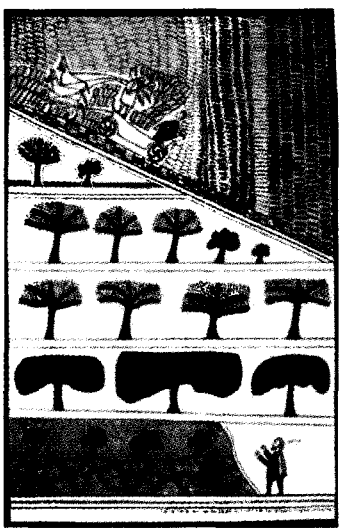
A WOMAN OF VALOR

Poster, edition of 1,000, numbered and plate-signed
40" x 29" $400



THE NIGHT OF REDEMPTION FROM EGYPT

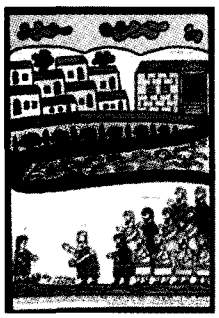
Lithograph, edition of 285, numbered and signed by hand
30" x 22" $1200



ELIJAH ASCENDING TO HEAVEN

Lithograph, edition of 300, numbered and signed by hand
30" x 22" $1200

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



JOSEPH'S
DREAMS

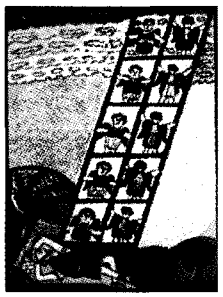
Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
20" x 14" $500

MOSES RECEIVING
THE LAW

Lithograph, edition of 300, numbered and signed by hand
26" x 18" $850

THE TOWER
OF BABEL

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
20" x 14" $800

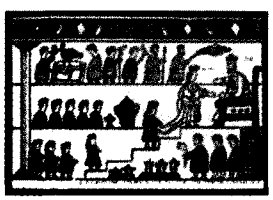


JACOB'S
LADDER II

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
20" x 14" $500

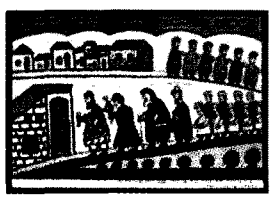
THE JUDGMENT
OF SOLOMON

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
20" x 14" $500



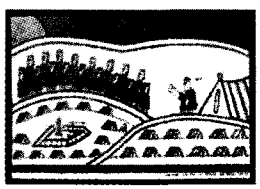
SOLOMON AND
THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
14" x 20" $450



ISAAC WEDS
REBECCA

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
14" x 20" $500



MOSES DECLARES
THE FEASTS

Lithograph, edition of 500, numbered and signed by hand
14" x 20" $450

To order, please call (212) 891-6733

MasterCard, American Express, and Visa are welcome.

—

PLEASE NOTE THAT WORKS ARE SOLD UNFRAMED.

ORDERS ARE SENT VIA FEDEX 2-DAY SERVICE.

A CHARGE OF $24.95 WILL BE ADDED FOR HANDLING AND SHIPPING
TO ADDRESSES IN THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES.

FOR DELIVERY ELSEWHERE, PLEASE INQUIRE.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any of us to change our politics." But he belies this statement when he notes that establishing social policies genuinely blind to gender and race "will require us to jettison an apparatus of laws, regulations, and bureaucracies that has been 40 years in the making," by which he means, at the very least, affirmative action in education and employment.

Nor is it clear why Mr. Murray considers the concept of superiority inappropriate in discussing inequalities among groups. True superiority is every bit as real, observable, and measurable as group differences. History has determined the relative importance of various human traits and abilities. As a result, the natural inequality of nations, leveraged by their size and power, has made some superior to others for protracted periods. There is thus a sociobiological foundation for such historical phenomena as colonialism, relations between the West and the Muslim world, the rise-fall-rise cycle of Germany and Japan in the 20th century, and the steep ascent of China and India in the last two decades.

LEONID HANIN
Idaho State University
Pocatello, Idaho

TO THE EDITOR:

On average, Americans are taller than Chinese. Notwithstanding this statistical truth, Yao Ming is 7-foot-5 and averages eighteen points a game for the NBA's Houston Rockets. This example should be kept in mind by those tempted to take umbrage at Charles Murray's statements about group differences in IQ. Mr. Murray propounds no outlandish theory but merely analyzes available data. Factual statements on this topic ought not be more controversial than statements about differences in height between Americans and Chinese.

There would be no need for Mr. Murray or anyone else to make a public issue of this sort of aggregated data were it not for the ceaseless agitation of radical egalitarians who insist that every inequality is an injustice. Until they relent in their advocacy of perverse policies of preference, Charles Murray must continue to speak about the inconvenient facts.

ROBERT STACY MCCAIN
Hagerstown, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

I commend Charles Murray for thinking clearly about the subject of inequality. In reading his essay, I was reminded of Emerson's observation that "In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty." Well done, Mr. Murray, for having the intellectual conscience to publish this article.

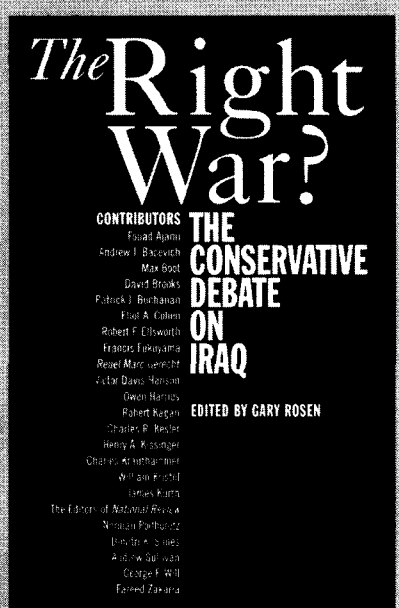
TIMOTHY MITCHELL
San Clemente, California

CAMBRIDGE

New from Cambridge

To declare oneself a conservative in American foreign policy is to enter immediately into a fractious, long-standing debate. Should America retreat from the world, deal with the world as it is, or try to transform it in its own image? Which school of thought—traditionalist, realist, or neoconservative—is truest to the country's ideals and interests? *The Right War?* brings together the most articulate and influential voices in the debate among conservatives over the tactics and strategy of America's engagement in Iraq, running the gamut from protests to second thoughts to full-throated endorsements.

FEATURING CONTRIBUTIONS BY:
Fouad Ajami, Andrew J. Bacevich, Max Boot, David Brooks, Patrick J. Buchanan, Eliot A. Cohen, Robert F. Ellsworth, Francis Fukuyama, Reuel Marc Gerecht, Victor Davis Hanson, Owen Harries, Robert Kagan, Charles R. Kesler, Henry A. Kissinger, Charles Krauthammer, William Kristol, James Kurth, The Editors of *National Review*, Norman Podhoretz, Dimitri K. Simes, Andrew Sullivan, George F. Will, and Fareed Zakaria



THE RIGHT WAR? The Conservative Debate on Iraq
Edited by Gary Rosen
$65.00: Hardback: 0-521-85681-7
$22.99: Paperback: 0-521-67318-6

Available online, from your bookstore or at www.cambridge.org/us

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

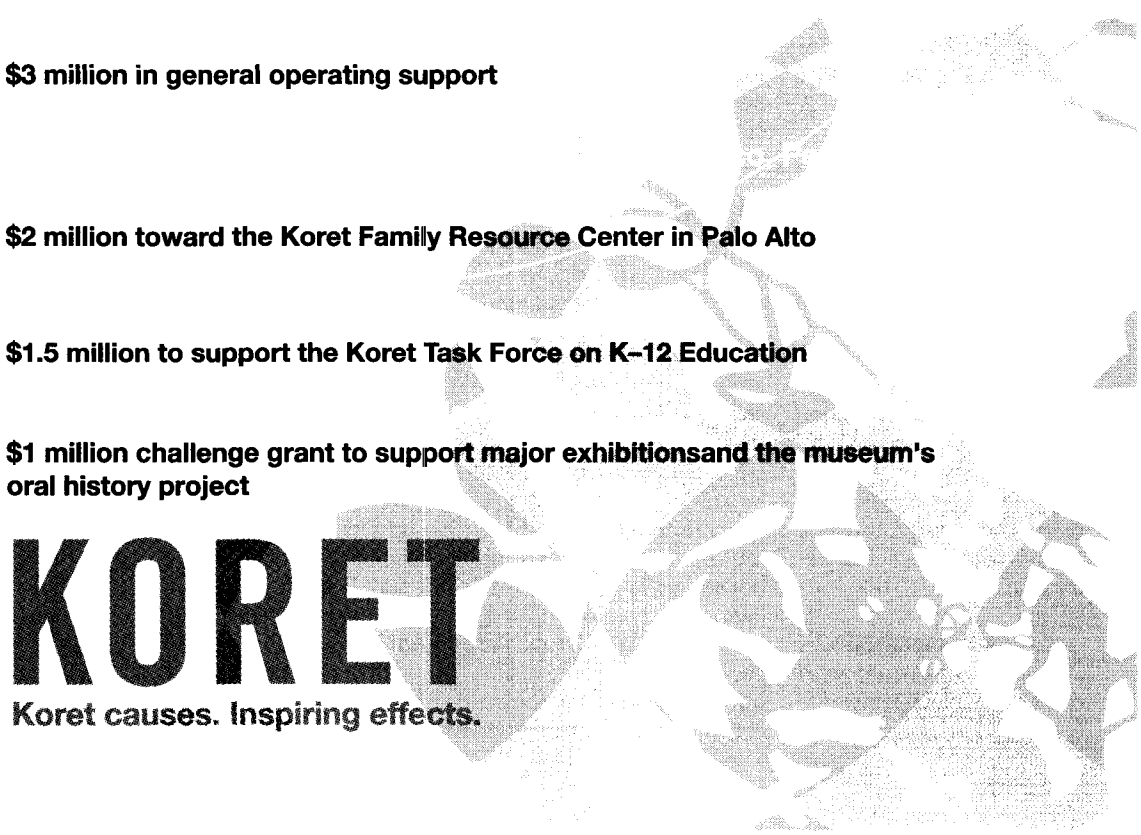
$15 million partnership with the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture to support the capital campaign for a Jewish community campus in Palo Alto

$3 million in general operating support

$2 million toward the Koret Family Resource Center in Palo Alto

$1.5 million to support the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education

$1 million challenge grant to support major exhibitionsand the museum's oral history project



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHARLES MURRAY writes:

The thoughtful letters sent to COMMENTARY accord with others I received after publication of "The Inequality Taboo"—some agreeing, some disagreeing, but none hyperventilating. Perhaps this is relevant to Peter M. Connolly's worries about what would happen if it were once more acceptable to talk openly about group differences. In my personal experience, we seem to be doing this better than we did eleven years ago when *The Bell Curve* appeared.

I have no argument with Mr. Connolly's characterization of the conversation a century ago. But can we not move toward greater openness without moving all the way back to the world he invokes? Let me propose a more optimistic view of history. The civil-rights legislation of the 1960's did not pass because courageous politicians were morally ahead of their constituents, but because a sea change had already occurred in the attitudes of the white electorate. A more open conversation about race would not take us back to blackface and overt anti-Semitism for the same reason that the nation would not resegregate hotels and restaurants if the civil-rights legislation were repealed. We live in a different culture from the one of our great-grandparents, based on changed standards of behavior. We can argue about who gets credit for the change but not about whether a fundamental change has occurred.

Barton L. Ingraham asks a sensible question: who cares about black-white differences on the abstract items in *g*-loaded tests if the differences on real-world items in achievement tests are diminishing? The problem is that the gap in achievement-test scores is still large, and we also may not have "the prospect of further gains in the future" that Mr. Ingraham sees. Convergence effectively stopped in the mid- to late 1980's, a plateau that is now almost two decades old.

It is hard to think of contemporaneous trends in the economic, educational, or social conditions of blacks since the mid-1980's that can explain this plateau. Those who see a large genetic component in the black-white difference have a parsimonious explanation. Part of the black-white difference in test scores, they stipulate, is environmental in origin. The period from World War II to the 1990's saw dramatic improvements in the environment for black children, and the environmental source of the black-white difference diminished accordingly. Progress stopped, they contend, because the capacity of environmental changes to close the gap was exhausted.

The results from highly *g*-loaded tests offer a way to test the consistency of this logic. Psychometric *g* is the most heritable component of cognitive ability and, accordingly, the least influenced by environmental changes. The implication is that convergence in highly *g*-loaded tests over time will be smaller than convergence in achievement tests. That implication seems to be borne out by the available data. The case isn't closed, but such findings make me pessimistic about the likelihood and speed of future convergence.

I agree with Peter Heiman that race as a biological entity is qualitatively different from gender and also that the race variable does not consist of "essential whiteness" on one end of a continuum and "essential blackness" on the other. I think of race as a multi-dimensional continuous variable. Until now, constrained by limits on our ability to categorize race, we have been compelled to ignore subgroups and admixtures that are obvious to all. Progress in genetics has already made it possible to attach a metric to the continuous variable of race. The next step, probably still some years away, is to discover the nature of the dimensions buried in the aggregate variable (in the same sense that a measure of socioeconomic status has, buried within it, dimensions measuring income, occupation, and education). Even now, however, it is within our capability to answer many questions about the co-relationship of race, measured continuously, and IQ scores.

Mr. Heiman and I also agree that picking Presidents according to IQ score is not a good idea. But I think he underestimates how much we know about the importance of *g* to success in life. I recommend a reading of the first twelve chapters of *The Bell Curve*, and the very extensive literature reviewed there.

The short answer is that *g* is to real-world success as weight is to an offensive tackle in the NFL. Heaviest isn't best, but if you do not weigh at least 250 pounds, forget about it. Similarly, the best physician, CEO, or astrophysicist is probably not the one with the highest IQ; but there is a minimum that aspirants to those jobs have to bring to the table, and the more they have, on average, the better. Psychometric *g* is a flexible, all-purpose tool that enhances all of one's other abilities.

I am indebted to Russell Nieli for noting biological factors that are environmentally instead of genetically determined; it is a distinction that I should have included in the article. Their role in explaining group differences, however, is limited.

For example, nutrition is indeed important to IQ, and, worldwide, the distribution of nutrition is worse for black children than for white children. That discrepancy must explain some part of the worldwide black-white difference in IQ. But large numbers of American blacks have had good nutrition from birth. Studies of blacks and whites in upper socioeconomic brackets, where there are no major differences in such things as nutrition, exposure to lead, or pathogenic disease, consistently find that the absolute black-white difference as measured in IQ points is smaller than in the population at large, usually by 30 to 40 percent, but the relative difference measured in standard deviations remains unchanged or increases. Mr. Nieli's comments are well-taken, but we have no reason to think that equalizing the physical environment will get rid of a large intractable component of the black-white difference.

Leonid Hanin correctly identifies an implication of intractable group differences that is associated with conservative politics: namely,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

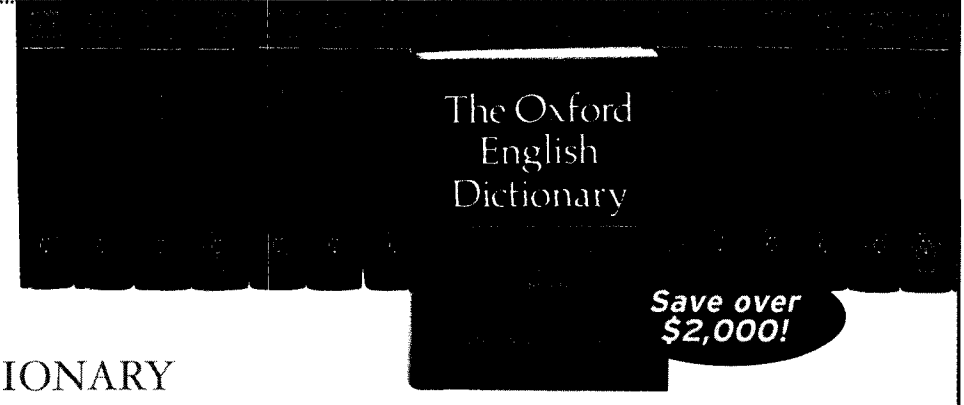
OXFORD REFERENCE SETS

AT AMAZING LOW PRICES!

Where the English language lives!

"The greatest work in dictionary-making ever undertaken."
—The New York Times

"All the raw material a writer needs for a lifetime of work." —Annie Proulx



Save over $2,000!

THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

For word-lovers, there can be no greater gift than the 20-volume OED. Here in all its glory is the fascinating history and infinite richness of the English language: over 22,000 pages of definitions, 2.4 million illustrative quotations, full etymologies, dates of first recorded use, examples of how meanings have changed over the centuries, and more. Begun in 1857, first published in 1928, and subsequently revised, updated, and expanded, the OED is the mother of all dictionaries—the first choice for writers, scholars, and anyone intrigued by the origin, history, and meaning of the words we use.

20-vol. set, 0-19-861186-2 List Price $3,000.00 **Sale Price $995.00**

Set the table!

"Fascinating, informative...a wealth of information on every aspect of American food and drink."
–Washington Post

THE OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FOOD AND DRINK IN AMERICA

2-Volume Set
Edited by Andrew F. Smith

A wonderful complement to a season of feasting and good cheer, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* covers everything from peanut butter to Pinot Noir, Colonel Sanders to Martha Stewart, how Thanksgiving became a national tradition to how Bourbon differs from Tennessee Whiskey, and more.

2-vol. set, 0-19-515437-1 List Price $250.00 **Sale Price: $195.00**

Available for the first time as a complete set!

"Oxford University Press and the Annenberg Public Policy Center have teamed up to produce an ambitious series... about major institutions of American democracy. "
–Education Next

INSTITUTIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The five institutions of democracy are the foundation of the American experience. The nation's leading scholars and practitioners gathered to assess keeping these institutions vital to our policial and social life. A landmark project in breadth and ambition, these 5 volumes will make the ideal gift for anyone who values citizenship as our highest calling.

0-19-530839-5 List Price $299.95 **Sale Price $150.00**

A symphony of inspiring scholarship!

"A landmark event in the musical world."
–San Francisco Chronicle

THE NEW GROVE DICTIONARY OF MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

29-Volume Set, Second Edition

For anyone wishing to explore the enormous breadth and depth of the human experience of music, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* offers a wealth of information: 20,000 biographies and 29,000 authoritative articles on such topics as instruments, styles, terms, genres, world music, popular music, and more.

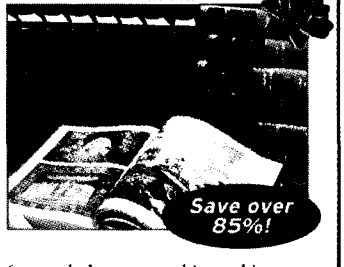
0-19-517067-9 List Price $4,850.00 **Sale Price $1,500.00**

Look it up!

"The most ambitious art publishing venture of the late 20th century... an awesome single source of world art."
–The New York Times

THE DICTIONARY OF ART

34-Volume Set



With 41,000 signed articles by 6,700 scholars, 22,000 biographies, and 15,000 illustrations, *The Dictionary of Art* is to art what the *OED* is to English language—a resource of unequalled grandeur and inexhaustible usefulness, providing comprehensive coverage of the visual arts of every culture and civilization from prehistory to the present.

0-19-517068-7 List Price $8,800.00 **Sale Price $1,100.00**

TO ORDER THESE AND MANY MORE TITLES ONLINE, VISIT WWW.OUP.COM/US/COMMENTARY
AVAILABLE FROM ALL PARTICIPATING RETAILERS, OR DIRECTLY FROM OXFORD AT 1-800-451-7556
MENTION PROMO CODE 24987

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that strong affirmative action is misguided and ought to be dismantled. But I think the Left also has a potentially sweeping and powerful argument for its redistributionist ambitions. It goes like this: science is demonstrating that no one deserves his IQ. If, then, IQ is important in determining economic success in life—increasingly important, as John Engelman points out in his letter—why reward lucky people with high incomes? We should not be surprised if, ten or twenty years from now, leftists seize upon the genetic origin of individual and group differences as passionately as they now deny it.

As for my observation about the irrelevance of superiority and inferiority that Mr. Hanin criticizes, it applies to individuals, not to civilizations, and I deeply believe it. My higher-IQ friends do certain things better than my lower-IQ friends. They are not superior people.

Civilizations are more amenable to superior/inferior designations than individuals, but even in those cases, disaggregation is necessary. Having lived for an extended period in a Southeast Asian culture, I am convinced that, on certain dimensions, such a culture is superior to our own. But on others, it is inferior. How one assesses a civilization's aggregate score depends on how one values the components.

Power Politics

To the Editor:

One need not be an "oil hawk," as Peter W. Huber and Mark P. Mills refer to some members of our Set America Free Coalition, to lose sleep over the prospect that tens of trillions of dollars could be shipped to the Persian Gulf in the coming decades in order to satisfy the world's appetite for oil ["Getting Over Oil," September]. Such a transfer of wealth would contribute materially to the terrorist threats we face, and should be of concern to every American.

In a time of global war against radical Islam, it is imperative that our national expenditures on energy be directed away from those who would use them against us. The only way to accomplish this is to achieve in the transportation sector of our economy, where two-thirds of our oil is consumed, what was achieved in the power sector following the 1973 oil embargo: a shift from oil to domestic sources of energy.

We agree with the authors that the electrification of transportation through massive deployment of plug-in hybrid cars is a critical part of the solution, but we strongly object to their laissez-faire approach that would leave our future to the forces of the free market while the government sits on its hands.

In a perfect world, it would not be the role of the government to intervene in the energy market or to pick technological winners. But at a time when we are at war, when Communist China competes with us over access to the world's oil, and when most oil companies acknowledge that (in the words of Chevron's CEO) "the age of easy oil is over," we do not have time to experiment with textbook theories of economics. It is the role of government to advance public policy that provides for the common defense.

Messrs. Huber and Mills's thesis that the free market can solve our energy crisis fails on another ground. The energy market is not a truly free market but one that is heavily rigged in favor of the big oil and automobile companies. The recently passed energy bill, which includes billions of dollars' worth of tax breaks for oil and gas companies, is a stark reminder of this. While we do not advocate rolling back government support for the petroleum industry, we do think the government should level the playing field and promote free competition among alternative-energy suppliers. Purely on national-security grounds, it should also encourage Americans to shift from petroleum- to non-petroleum-based fuels like electricity and liquid fuels made from plentiful domestic resources like coal, agricultural material, and waste products.

Messrs. Huber and Mills's aversion to a government push for fuel efficiency ignores those cases in which government intervention has effected positive change. They wrongly suggest, for example, that the successful market penetration of hybrid cars happened "not because of decrees from Washington," but thanks to "market forces alone." It is true that the new hybrids are attractive and perform well, but the rapid adoption of the technology would not have been possible without the federal and state tax credits that consumers have used to cover the premium they pay for such a car. The authors' favorite technology, plug-in hybrids, which we support wholeheartedly, will demand an even higher premium from early adopters, and rapid market penetration will require a helping hand from Washington.

The pervasive role of government has long been a source of concern to Americans, but considering the threats our country is facing, leaving our oil supply and transportation sector suspended in limbo between jihadists and free marketers is far scarier.

Frank J. Gaffney, Jr.
Anne Korin
Gal Luft
Set America Free Coalition
Washington, D.C.

To the Editor:

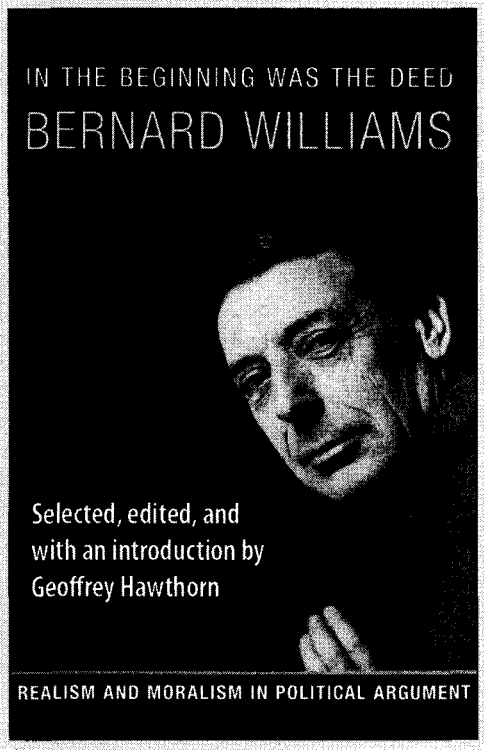
Peter W. Huber and Mark P. Mills state correctly that the peaking of our oil reserves need not lead to a catastrophe, since oil, for most of its purposes, can be replaced. But the authors miss key points.

The first is that we are running out of natural gas and have started to import it in large quantities from the same unstable Middle East that we have relied upon for oil. It makes no sense to switch to a "hydrogen economy" that uses natural gas to make the hydrogen. There is no alternative to obtaining 60 percent of our energy from non-fossil-fuel sources. Coal may be plentiful, but replacing oil with coal (as the authors advocate) would increase its consumption fourfold, and our more easily recoverable reserves would be depleted in less than 30 years. Moreover, greater coal consumption might accelerate global warming and increase pollution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Distinguished Perspectives

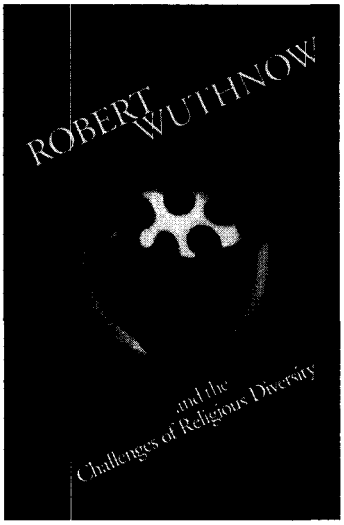
"A volume of permanent value for anyone with an interest in contemporary philosophy and its engagement with the social and political world."*


IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE DEED
BERNARD WILLIAMS
Selected, edited, and with an introduction by Geoffrey Hawthorn
REALISM AND MORALISM IN POLITICAL ARGUMENT

These posthumously collected essays from one of the most original philosophers of the past fifty years address justice, liberty, and equality; the meaning of toleration; power and the fear of power; democracy; and the nature of political philosophy itself.

*—Richard Moran, Harvard University

Cloth $29.95 0-691-12430-2

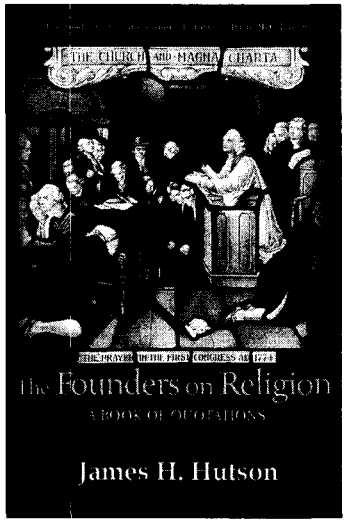


America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity

Robert Wuthnow

"As Robert Wuthnow amply documents, the United States is (on the whole) an open and welcoming country, ready to extend the full benefits of citizenship to strangers who could expect second-class status in much of the rest of the world."
—Gary Rosen,
New York Times Book Review

Cloth $29.95 0-691-11976-7



The Founders on Religion

A Book of Quotations

James H. Hutson

"What a superb and very welcome book this is. The quotations chosen by James Hutson are more than just wonderful reading. Transcending time, they are as illuminating and provocative, as wise, heartfelt, and uplifting as when they were written."
—David McCullough, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and biographer, author of *John Adams*

Cloth $19.95 0-691-12033-1

American Exceptionalism and Human Rights

Edited by Michael Ignatieff

Leading experts examine how and why America's approach to human rights differs from that of most other Western nations. Contributors include Stanley Hoffmann, Frank Michelman, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Carol Steiker, Cass Sunstein.

Paper $24.95 0-691-11648-2
Cloth $75.00 0-691-11647-4

Mercy on Trial

What It Means to Stop an Execution

Austin Sarat

When (if ever) should mercy be extended? Austin Sarat acknowledges the risks associated with mercy—but, he argues, those risks are worth taking.

"This thoughtful book should be read by every citizen who cares about the issue, and by every governor and president entrusted with the power to punish or pardon."—Senator Edward M. Kennedy

Cloth $29.95 0-691-12140-0

Painful Choices

A Theory of Foreign Policy Change

David A. Welch

"A compelling theory of foreign policy change is supported by highly readable plausibility probes. David Welch's impeccable scholarship has succeeded where most of ours has failed us—joining analytical parsimony with policy relevance."
—Peter J. Katzenstein, Cornell University

Cloth $35.00 0-691-12340-3

Celebrating 100 Years of Excellence

PRINCETON *University Press*

800-777-4726
Read excerpts online
www.pup.princeton.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Other solutions, like solar thermal energy with storage, could supply most of our energy needs and could be coupled with wind, nuclear energy, and, in the future, solar cells. Switching to these sources would take at least thirty years at a cost of at least $200 million a year. With the future so uncertain, private industry will not invest in building new plants without incentives. Thus, government intervention is needed. On the bright side, the technology needed to solve our energy problems already exists; we lack only the will.

The authors are wrong to think that energy consumption cannot be decreased. The 1974 "corporate average fuel economy" (CAFE) laws were so effective that in twenty years gasoline consumption decreased by 30 percent despite an increase by 50 percent in the number of cars. This achievement was wiped out completely when President Clinton allowed SUV's to be produced through a loophole in the law. His decision is the main cause of our current oil crisis.

If we do not change our ways substantially, the peaking of the fossil-fuel supply can catch us unprepared and lead to the total breakdown of our society. Unfortunately, the analysis presented by Messrs. Huber and Mills lulls the reader into an illusory complacency. It is based on the belief that the free market will always solve our problems and that new resources can always be found if the price of extant resources is increased. They fail to recognize that the increase in prices may be highly nonlinear and thus much greater than our economy can absorb.

REUEL SHINNAR
Clean Fuels Institute
City College of New York
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

The optimism of Peter W. Huber and Mark P. Mills is unwarranted. They argue that switching from oil to electricity will alleviate our dependence on the former. The energy for the production of electricity will come from coal, uranium, natural gas, and, at the margins, from the harnessing of non-stored solar energy in its various forms: hydropower, wind, photovoltaics, biomass, etc. But all these sources of primary energy have their own constraints.

A reversion to coal, the main primary energy source before the oil era, will be hampered by finite availability, environmental rules, and a scarcity of miners. Uranium is scarcer than coal, and the long-term storage of nuclear waste still awaits a solution acceptable to all parties. Natural gas as a resource is indistinguishable from oil not only because it represents the lighter end of the hydrocarbon continuum; it is, or will be, mainly imported, and gas resources geographically overlap oil resources. The contribution of solar energy will increase with time, but it will be decades before its contribution to our total energy needs will be meaningful, and its cost will far exceed even the recent, seemingly exorbitant, cost of oil.

Finally, Messrs. Huber and Mills suggest that the quest of a billion people in China and another billion in India to move from "carbohydrate power" to hydrocarbons, which exerts a sharp upward pressure on the cost of oil, will be satisfied by hypothetical, superefficient engineering marvels. They magnanimously accord these masses the use of hybrid rickshaws but not of Hummers. The decisionmakers in China, India, and elsewhere are nevertheless trying frantically to assure themselves oil supplies just to be on the safe side.

A further illustration of the unwarranted optimism of Messrs. Huber and Mills is their description of hydrogen as "technically easy" to extract from water or natural gas—despite the fact that each step in its production, distribution, and storage is a potential showstopper. The last ten years of hype and heavy outlays on hydrogen have hardly made an advance toward practical use.

Tightness in the oil supply and consequent price increases in the next few decades are a virtual certainty. The experience of the last 40 years should be sufficient to disabuse the authors of any facile possibility of "getting over oil." The getting, if any, will be painful and disruptive and fraught with dangerous conflicts.

MORDECAI SHELEF
Bloomfield Village, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR:

I was surprised that Peter W. Huber and Mark P. Mills did not mention nuclear fusion technology. As I understand it, nuclear fusion is the ultimate answer to our energy problem. When this technology is perfected we will have available to us virtually unlimited, nonpolluting, radiation-free energy. We ought to be devoting the same level of funding and scientific application to nuclear energy as we did to the Manhattan Project.

JOHN E. BRIGHT
Fairfax Station, Virginia

PETER W. HUBER and MARK P. MILLS write:

Frank J. Gaffney, Jr., Anne Korin, and Gal Luft do not want Americans to buy oil from people who fund, harbor, or incite our enemies. We, too, would like to bankrupt those people; but we differ on how that can be done.

As we pointed out in our article, the United States, by itself, does not buy all that much oil from the Persian Gulf—but the rest of the world certainly does, and the global economy is growing rapidly. Short of a quarantine, or an invasion, the only way to make the current owners of oil poorer is to lower the price of oil.

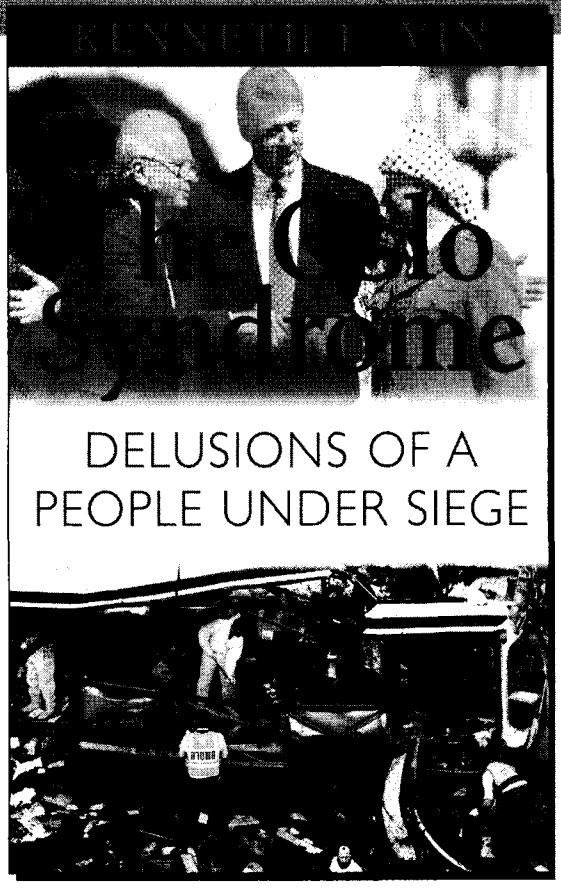
One way to do that is to produce more oil, or more of a good substitute. The oil hawks named in our article have concluded that the best way forward is to grow lots of corn and switchgrass on the prairies and convert it into alcohol fuel. They might be right—but, then again, they might be wrong. Reuel Shinnar apparently prefers solar and wind to grass. John E. Bright likes nuclear fusion.

We invite Messrs. Gaffney, Shinnar, and Bright to work out among themselves whether the first hundred-billion dollars in government subsidies, tax credits, and so forth should chase the sun above (right to its core, if we want to put our money on fusion), the grass below, or the wind in between. What is clear is that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*The Oslo Syndrome* may be the most important manifesto of our generation . . ."

— CYNTHIA OZICK



Analysts and pundits offer explanations of what went wrong with Oslo but never address the key questions:

Why did Israel embrace Yasser Arafat as its "peace partner" even as he assured his people and the Arab world his goal remained Israel's annihilation?

Why were Israel's leaders undeterred even when, after the initial Oslo accords, the Palestinians unleashed an unprecedented wave of anti-Israel terror?

Why was the response more Israeli concessions?
In his original and powerfully persuasive analysis, Kenneth Levin, an instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and a Princeton-trained historian:

- **Identifies the self-delusions embraced by Israeli proponents of Oslo.**
- **Relates those delusions to psychological responses common among besieged populations.**
- **Demonstrates links between the evolution of the Oslo debacle and historic reactions of Diaspora Jews to bias and attack.**

"In these extraordinary pages, Kenneth Levin writes — with uncommon clarity and brilliance — not so much about the great outer wilderness of anti-Jewish perfidy as about the internal self-mystifications and self-denials that annihilate Jewish dignity and Jewish independence. ***The Oslo Syndrome*** **may be the most important manifesto of our generation, an indispensable analysis that explains the present and may yet save the future."**

—CYNTHIA OZICK

"Part political history of Israel and part study of the relationship of Jews to the Jewish state of Israel, **this hugely interesting, highly informed, and very timely work is a must read** for all those looking to understand the self-loathing that exists among some Jews when it comes to attitudes to Israel and wider Jewish issues." —EFRAIM KARSH

The Oslo Syndrome can be purchased at Barnes and Noble, Borders, and fine bookstores everywhere. Or order directly at 888-282-2881.

PUBLISHED BY SMITH AND KRAUS GLOBAL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without direct government subsidy, each of these alternatives remains prohibitively expensive in all but a few niche applications.

Meanwhile, global oil sales at current prices generate about $1.5 trillion a year. Speaking for ourselves, we doubt that the U.S. government can have any useful impact on a market of that size by regulating, spending, taxing, or crediting. Even if (say) one or two countries can spare 50 million fertile acres to grow corn and switchgrass, most of the world's oil-consuming nations cannot.

The most obvious and sensible place to look for alternatives to oil is where they are already established and in widespread use—which is to say, in the 60 percent of our energy economy that is powered by other fuels. As we noted in our article, and as Mr. Gaffney and his colleagues acknowledge, the electric sector of our economy shifted decisively away from oil—not to corn and switchgrass but to coal and uranium—following the oil shocks of the 1970's and 80's.

Mr. Shinnar objects that we will run out of coal. Sure we will, but not until the year 2834, give or take a few centuries; the U.S. has truly vast deposits of the stuff. Mr. Shinnar also states that we are running out of natural gas; but what we are really running out of is drilling permits and gas-transportation facilities. We have placed most of the Rockies off-limits, we refuse to build docking facilities for liquefied-natural-gas tankers, and we make it very difficult to build new pipelines connecting fields with gas to cities that need it.

Is uranium "scarcer than coal," as Mordecai Shelef contends? Ton for ton, it certainly is—but per unit of energy supplied, uranium deposits are, for all practical purposes, infinite. It is true, as Mr. Shelef writes, that all non-oil sources of energy "have their own constraints," as no one is more keenly aware than the nuclear industry. But those constraints arise mainly from domestic politics and perceptions, both of which may evolve quickly as Americans come to grips with the thoroughly nasty politics of foreign oil.

Looking forward, we join Mr. Gaffney and others in applauding the coming convergence of the electric and transportation sectors of our energy economy. More energy moves through our electrical grid than through the drive shafts of our cars; hybrid engines and batteries are coming that can bridge the divide; and gasoline at three dollars a gallon creates strong market incentives to bridge it. Also helpful, as we argued in "Getting Over Oil," would be a more rational regulation of the price of electricity and flatter energy taxes across the board. (Contrary to Mr. Shinnar's supposition that we see hydrogen as an alternative fuel, we believe only that it could serve as one possible bridge between the electric and transportation sectors.)

As for our preference for market solutions over government intervention, is today's "rapid adoption" of hybrid technology a product of such intervention in the form of tax credits, as Mr. Gaffney and his colleagues believe? No serious student of the matter would agree. Hybrid drives were incorporated into diesel locomotives and monster trucks as soon as the high-power semiconductors at their core matured. Falling prices and rising performance are now moving those same technologies into our cars. Without benefit of tax subsidies, all car manufacturers use them to electrify valves, brakes, steering, and radiator fans. The rest of the drive train will follow because it is now cheaper to build cars that way, and the cars perform better.

So much for the supply side. The other way to depress the value of Persian Gulf oil is to lower global demand. But how? According to Mr. Shinnar, fuel-economy standards have reduced gasoline consumption by 30 percent. If he truly believes that, he must be measuring against some imaginary curve 30 percent above current levels of consumption. U.S. gasoline consumption has in fact been rising inexorably since the days of Henry Ford. The curve has flattened only occasionally, and very briefly, in times of serious economic slowdown. No such flattening is imminent in today's vibrant global economy.

The simple, direct, and invariably effective way to curb demand for oil is to raise taxes on its end products. Principled conservatives who really believe in the need to control demand should have the political courage to back such increased taxes. It is timorous and unprincipled to continue to promise painless, government-prescribed, subsidized techno-fixes in the form of thousands of pages of regulation and tax-jiggering, all packaged in the name of "efficiency" and "conservation." As a review of the historical record confirms, that approach has never—*never*—worked in the past.

It fails not because consumers hate efficiency but because they like it so much. The faster we build more efficient engines, the more of them we build, and the more we use them—and the faster our energy consumption rises. Mr. Shelef complains that we are willing to consign the masses of China and India to "the use of hybrid rickshaws but not of Hummers." Quite the opposite: exotic and expensive new technologies invariably become cheaper, and any energy-consuming technology that begins as an expensive curiosity in San Francisco will end up as a staple in Shanghai. They will get the hybrid Hummers, too.

The experience of the past 40 years, Mr. Shelef writes, teaches that there is no "facile possibility of 'getting over oil.'" But what the 1960's and early 70's taught was in fact very different: a huge ramp-up in production of Persian Gulf oil in those years made it politically painless for the U.S. to ban almost all new drilling off the Florida and California coasts, and then in much of Alaska. As for the ensuing 30 years, what they have taught is that the pundits who kept telling us that we'd run out of oil were wrong, and so were all those who assured us we could slash demand by turning to the sun, wind, fusion, efficiency, and conservation.

Oil does present serious problems—which makes the position of the oil hawks doubly depressing. However well some of them may understand the world's po-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

www.jcpa.org

JERUSALEM VIEWPOINTS

Wartime Witch Hunt: Blaming Israel for the Iraq War

DORE GOLD

While some have charged that the primary interest of the Bush administration in going to war against Saddam Hussein was to defend Israeli security interests, by 2003 Iraq was clearly not Israel's primary concern. Instead, Iran was viewed as "the main existential threat to Israel."

Will a Gaza "Hamas-stan" Become a Future Al-Qaeda Sanctuary?

MAJ.-GEN. (RES.) YAAKOV AMIDROR AND DAVID KEYES

Would a security vacuum in a post-withdrawal Gaza facilitate al-Qaeda's entry there? In the past, al-Qaeda sought to establish itself wherever there was a security vacuum—in economically weak, failed states.

JERUSALEM ISSUE BRIEFS

Undermining Mahmud Abbas: The "Green Revolution" and the Hamas Strategy to Take Over the Palestinian Authority

LT. COL. JONATHAN D. HALEVI

From Hamas's standpoint, gaining political power will actually strengthen its ability to preserve its military forces and resort to terrorism when circumstances are appropriate. As Abbas opens the door to radical Islamic elements, an unwanted possible outcome may be the strengthening of Hamas and furthering the preconditions for eventual militant Islamic rule over the West Bank and Gaza.

Are There Signs of a Jordanian-Palestinian Reengagement?

DAN DIKER AND PINCHAS INBARI

King Abdullah's approval of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas's request to send the Jordanian-based Badr Brigade, which is part of the Palestine Liberation Army under the command of the Jordanian military, to help restore order in parts of the crime-ridden West Bank may represent the most significant sign of Jordanian reengagement in the West Bank since former King Hussein formally severed legal and administrative links there in July 1988.

DAILY ALERT

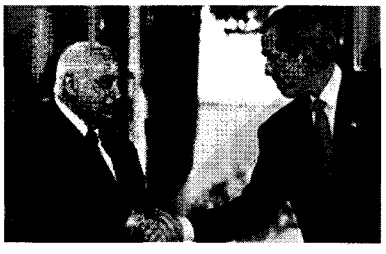
www.dailyalert.org

A daily digest of hyperlinked news and commentary on Israel and the Mideast from the world and Hebrew press, prepared for the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

NEWEST BOOKS

Defensible Borders for a Lasting Peace

DR. YUVAL STEINITZ, MAJ.-GEN. (RES.) YAAKOV AMIDROR, DR. MEIR ROSENNE, AND DR. DORE GOLD



Israel's decision to disengage from the Gaza Strip has placed the future of the disputed West Bank at the top of the international agenda. Israel's rights and requirements for defensible borders, as proposed by President George W. Bush, are now placed squarely on the global diplomatic agenda. This multi-disciplinary study focuses on Israel's minimal territorial requirements to enable it to defend itself in the post-Iraq War Middle East.

Israel and Europe: An Expanding Abyss?

MANFRED GERSTENFELD

In a reconnaissance mission into the essence of European-Israeli political relations, the author illustrates how Israel and often European Jewry have been made to pay for Europe's major strategic mistakes in defense, energy, and immigration policies. With comments by Jeffrey Gedmin, Andrei Markovits, Robert Wistrich, and others.

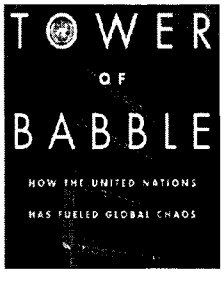
Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society

JUSTUS WEINER

Tens of thousands of Christians residing in areas "governed" by the Palestinian Authority have abandoned their holy sites and ancestral properties to live abroad, while those that remain do so as a beleaguered and dwindling minority.

Tower of Babble: How the United Nations Has Fueled Global Chaos

DORE GOLD (new, updated edition)



The UN was originally created in 1945 to halt aggression and safeguard human rights. But it has utterly failed at its mission, particularly in the 1990s when it repeatedly failed to stop acts of genocide, and expedited global chaos. Newly-expanded paperback just released with previously undisclosed "oil-for-food" details.

NGO MONITOR

www.ngo-monitor.org

Promoting critical debate and accountability of human rights NGOs in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

litical pathologies, they do not know more than the market does about supply and demand when it comes to oil, coal, gas, uranium, heat, shaft power, electricity, passenger miles in cars, freight miles in trucks, air miles in planes, hybrid-electric drive trains, and lithium batteries. So, to keep it simple, they tell us to grow corn and switchgrass.

The Zionist Left

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin begins his review of my book, *The Oslo Syndrome: Delusions of a People Under Siege* [September], by observing that the 1993 Oslo peace accords between Israel and the PLO—about which he himself was initially ambivalent—were "a horrendous blunder on Israel's part. Rarely in history has a country so foolishly opened its gates to a Trojan horse." Yet his review is curiously defensive of those responsible for this blunder, which has severely compromised Israel's security at a cost of thousands of dead and wounded.

I argue that the Israeli embrace of Oslo reflected a psychological phenomenon common among chronically besieged populations. Elements of such populations often take to heart the indictments of their besiegers, however bigoted or outrageous they may be, in the hope that by reforming themselves they will assuage their enemies and win relief—and peace. This was a common response of Jewish communities throughout the history of the Diaspora, and the ongoing Arab war against Israel has evoked a similar reaction in some Israelis, particularly in the decade-and-a-half preceding Oslo.

Mr. Halkin concedes that the "Oslo syndrome" as I construe it may have been a "necessary" condition for Israel's entering into the 1993 agreements, but insists it was not a sufficient one. Missing in my explanation, he argues, are political events that led Israel rationally in the direction of Oslo.

But there was nothing rational about Oslo. Mr. Halkin asserts that the PLO "had gradually softened its public positions" and was "indicating a readiness to recognize Israel in return for a Palestinian state." True, PLO spokesmen made ambiguous statements in English that could be interpreted this way. But, as the Israeli government well knew, Yasir Arafat continued his terror campaign and assured his constituency in Arabic that any softening of rhetoric for Western and Israeli consumption should be understood in terms of the PLO's "plan of phases." This meant negotiating for territory that it could then use as a base for pursuing Israel's annihilation.

Mr. Halkin's misplaced sensitivity for the Zionist Left leads him repeatedly to misrepresent my arguments. I discuss the adoption by early Russian socialist Zionists of attitudes toward religious and bourgeois Jews that parroted anti-Semitic caricatures. Many of the socialist Zionists chose to believe that it was those other Jews who were the targets of the anti-Semites, and that by peopling Zion with "new," secular, socialist Jews, they would end anti-Semitism. In response, Mr. Halkin suggests that I fail to appreciate that rebellion against traditional Jewish institutions was a necessary element of the Zionist movement.

In fact, I note that traditional institutions were not meeting the needs of a desperate Russian Jewry—not least because of czarist depredations—and alternatives were necessary and inevitable. But one could have rebelled against institutional inadequacies without embracing anti-Semitic perspectives. Herzl's vision, too, was a rebellion against established Jewish ways, but he conceived of the Jewish state as a refuge for all Jews. By contrast, many socialist Zionist leaders were insisting, even in the 1930's, that the new community in Palestine must avoid being contaminated by the immigration of too many religious or entrepreneurial Jews.

Mr. Halkin suggests that I wrongly characterize Jewish self-blame as a distinctly modern phenomenon. On the contrary, I give examples from the medieval period and argue that Jews were always vulnerable to such delusions. Mr. Halkin's point here, in any case, is to show that self-blame is not limited to the modern Jewish secular Left.

This defensiveness is unfortunate. The Oslo debacle was a creation of the Left, and it is vital for Israel that those who identify with the Left engage in soul-searching. The Arabs' demonization of Israel is not about to end, and the nation cannot afford, in its eagerness for "normalcy," once again to risk everything by chasing mirages of peace.

KENNETH LEVIN
Newton, Massachusetts

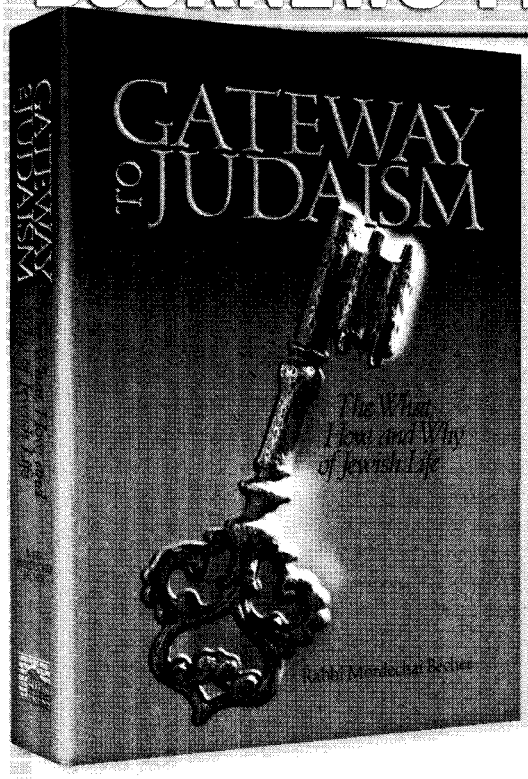
HILLEL HALKIN writes:

After reading Kenneth Levin's letter, I fail to see how my review of his book was "curiously defensive" of the Israeli leaders who blundered at Oslo. Why is it defending a blunder to attribute it to political miscalculations rather than to deep-seated psychological determinants? Isn't it a serious enough accusation to charge Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres with catastrophically misreading Yasir Arafat's intentions, without also imputing to them feelings of Jewish self-blame that there is not the slightest evidence of them having had?

As for my "misplaced sensitivity for the Zionist Left," as Mr. Levin calls it, this certainly does not include justifying many of the things that that Left stood for or did, such as its policies on Jewish immigration to Palestine under the British mandate. (It needs to be said, however, that in the years in which there were restrictions on Jewish immigration, *every* Zionist party fought to maximize the number of visas given to its own supporters, the less powerful right-wing parties as well.) The major point that Mr. Levin continues to miss is that, for large numbers of young Jews in pre-World War II Europe, the choice was not between joining the Zionist Left and joining the Zionist Right, but between the Zionist Left and the anti-Zionist Left. Does he really believe it would have benefited Zionism had tens of thousands of Jewish youngsters ended up as Bundists or Communists in Poland or Lithuania rather than as members of left-wing kibbutzim in Palestine?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKNEWS FROM ARTSCROLL



GATEWAY TO JUDAISM

by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life

Questions are the gateways of knowledge. After years of responding to the full gamut of queries about Judaism, **Rabbi Mordechai Becher** saw the need for a single volume that would explain the fundamentals of Jewish living, its underlying philosophy, and practical portrayals of how Jews actually live. ***Gateway to Judaism*** offers an engaging look at the mindset, values, and practices of Judaism in the 21st century.

Rabbi Becher opens the door for the newcomer, while providing new insights for those already familiar with the joy of Jewish living.

Rabbi Becher addresses such fascinating questions as:

- *Do we still need a Sabbath?*
- *Does God really need my prayers and complaints?*
- *Can Judaism enhance my marriage? My children?*
- *What relevance does circumcision have today?*
- *Is Israel central to Judaism? Does a religion need a land?*
- *Can I conduct a Passover Seder if I don't read Hebrew?*

Each chapter includes:

- *An introduction to the topic, including rationale and sources*
- *Practical laws and instructions*
- *Extensive endnotes, which provide a valuable reference tool for scholars, teachers and students of Judaism*
- *Vignettes of the lively Levy family applying Jewish law and values in daily life*

"Gateway to Judaism is a book that will inspire, inform and guide readers in exploring their Jewish heritage. The style is user-friendly and the profound philosophical and ethical teachings of Judaism are clearly presented in an up-to-date, relevant manner. To the question 'What is Judaism all about?' this book provides a thoroughly researched, comprehensive and very accessible response."

—JOE LIEBERMAN
U.S. Senator

"In today's challenging world, Jews must understand the how's and why's of our identity. This book gives cogent answers. I recommend it highly."

—NATAN SHARANSKY
Former Member of Knesset and Minister
Author of Fear No Evil *and* The Case for Democracy

"This is what we've been waiting for! Rabbi Becher's masterpiece is thoroughly engaging and comprehensive in scope. His presentation and advocacy of a vibrant and pertinent Judaism will capture your imagination and enhance commitment to the Jewish way of life."

—DR. FLORENCE NEUMANN
Bronfman Center for Jewish Life, 92nd Street Y, New York

A SHAAR PRESS PUBLICATION

SPECIAL OFFER UNTIL 12/31/05:

Purchase any of the over 1000 titles at www.artscroll.com
or call 1-800-MESORAH and receive 10% OFF plus FREE GROUND SHIPPING IN THE USA
To receive free shipping you must use promotion code CM1205 when placing your order.

visit ARTSCROLL.com

Special offers • Gift certificates • Sample chapters • Complete product information
• Forthcoming books • Quick delivery • Find a store

CALL FOR YOUR FREE FULL COLOR 2005 CATALOG 1-800-MESORAH (1-800-637-6724)

Available at your local Hebrew bookstore or call: 1-800-MESORAH • In NYS: (718) 921-9000 • FAX: (718) 680-1875 • www.artscroll.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kenneth Levin is not the first to assert that the Zionist Left "parroted anti-Semitic caricatures." He wishes that, instead, it had had "Herzl's vision," which "rebelled against institutional inadequacies without embracing anti-Semitic perspectives." This is not the place for a discussion of what the anti-Semitic perspectives on European Jewish life had in common with Zionist perspectives—how could they not have shared certain critiques, when both repudiated that life?—but I would point out that Mr. Levin is again creating a falsely simplistic dichotomy, this time between a "self-blaming" Zionist Left and a "self-affirming" Zionist Right as represented by Herzl. Would he care to guess, for example, who declared in 1899, when the Zionist Left hardly existed, that "Zionism is a kind of new Jewish care for the sick. We have stepped in as volunteer nurses, and we want to cure the patients—the poor, sick Jewish people—by means of a healthful way of life on our own ancestral soil"?

The answer is Theodor Herzl. And it was also Herzl, in an article in the Zionist organ *Die Welt* entitled "*Mauschel*" (a derogatory term for a haggling Jewish merchant—and by extension for Jews in general—used by German anti-Semites), who wrote in 1897 (I am quoting only a small part of the passage):

> Who is this *Mauschel* anyway? A type, my dear friends, a figure that keeps reappearing over the ages, the hideous companion of the Jew and so inseparable from him that the two have always been confused with each other. A Jew is a human being like any other—no better and no worse, possibly intimidated and embittered by persecution, and very steadfast in suffering. *Mauschel* on the other hand is a distortion of human character, something unspeakably low and repugnant. . . . These irreconcilable, inexplicable antitheses make it seem as though at some dark moment in our history some inferior human material got into our unfortunate people and blended with it.

Was Herzl too, then, a self-hating Jew? Or was he simply describing what he, no less than the Zionist Left, took to be the deleterious effects of Diaspora life on his own people? This is something for Kenneth Levin to ponder.

Ayn Rand

TO THE EDITOR:

Algis Valiunas criticizes Ayn Rand's "unlimited faith in reason," complaining that "there are no mysteries in her world" ["Who Needs Ayn Rand?," September]. She certainly did hold reason as an absolute—except, of course, that one cannot do so on "faith," since the very concept of faith names a belief held in *contrast* to reason. Accordingly, she repudiated all forms of mysticism—from the subjectivism of the wanton emotionalist to the dogmatism of the fervent religionist. Mr. Valiunas suggests that Rand's philosophy—Objectivism—is impractical, that it is born of "girlish daydreams" and ends in "utopian fantasy." But which approach is actually disconnected from reality: one based strictly on reason and the world we perceive, or one based on blind faith and feelings?

To endorse reason is to endorse principles—unequivocal, unbending standards. Though Mr. Valiunas criticizes Rand's refusal to accept any watering down of what he concedes are her "fine ideas," Rand's opposition to compromise was . . . uncompromising. She held that man survives by using reason—not by using reason sometimes and unreason at other times.

In championing rational self-interest in ethics and laissez-faire capitalism in politics, Rand held that your life belongs entirely to you—not partly to your neighbor or partly to the state. Any attempt to compromise with one's moral opposite, she argued—any attempt to find some "middle ground" between reason and mysticism, between egoism and altruism, between capitalism and statism—can achieve only the advancement of evil.

Since Mr. Valiunas believes that one is not responsible for one's own moral character, he insists that human interactions should be governed not by justice but by compassion—that is, the acknowledgment and forgiveness of moral failings. Thus, he derogates Rand for making sweeping judgments of certain people as "looting lice" or "subhuman creatures." But how would he characterize such abject repudiators of reason as the Hurricane Katrina looters, or the creatures in Iraq who behead Americans to the gleeful chants of "*Allahu akhbar*," or, even worse, the subhuman intellectuals who try to justify such irrationality? The one point on which Mr. Valiunas is completely correct is that Rand would indeed regard compassion for them as "a triumph of sloppy feeling over lucid reason."

Rand's philosophy of Objectivism has had a vast cultural influence. On the centenary of her birth, she deserves to be celebrated by those who understand that the values on which man's life depend—science, technology, production, progress, capitalism—require, at their root, an unwavering dedication to reason.

PETER SCHWARTZ
Ayn Rand Institute
Irvine, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Algis Valiunas's scornful article on Ayn Rand was artfully crafted. It gives many details (not all of them correct) about Rand's life and achievements and carefully avoids any discussion of the content of her philosophy.

Let us consider the factual errors first. Ayn Rand's name was not taken from her typewriter. Her husband Frank O'Connor was never an alcoholic, and though he was not an intellectual genius, he was a man of impeccable character. Rand did not reject her lover Nathaniel Branden out of jealousy, but because he spent many years deceiving her. She was not opposed to all charity.

Now let us consider what Mr. Valiunas fails to discuss: Rand's stunning achievements in philosophy. (See L. Peikoff's *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*.) She was the first philosopher: to identify and validate the axioms of philosophy; to val-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Is it the "root cause" of unending war and of terror?

There are many who are convinced that the existence of Israel and its "alien" presence in the predominantly Moslem Middle East is the "root cause" of the ongoing and never-ending violence in the area and of terror in the world. And that if it were not for Israel, peace would prevail and terror would cease. That premise is assiduously advocated by the Arab and Moslem nations.

What are the facts?

Israel is a tiny country, with only six million inhabitants (a million of whom are Arabs). It is surrounded by 22 Arab countries, with 300 million people. Their combined land area is greater than that of all of Europe. Despite this disparity in size and population, Arab propaganda has convinced the world, even many well-meaning people in the United States, that Israel is the mighty Goliath compared to the puny Arab states. It is a supreme irony that six million Israelis, surrounded by implacable enemies who are fixated on their destruction, are considered a mortal danger to the Arabs and perhaps even to the peace of the world. And that if it were not for the Jews, were it not for Israel, peace would descend and terror would cease.

> "...the lust for terror will not end until Arab-Moslems come to terms with the West and accept its predominant role."

Israel, despite constant propaganda to the contrary, is not the "root cause" of this strife and turmoil in the Middle East. Violence and war are endemic in Arab society and in Arab history. Israel was not involved in the deaths of the millions who died in the Iraq-Iran war. Arab-Moslems killed over a million black Christians and animists in the Sudan and brought intolerable suffering to that impoverished region. The Sudanese government, dominated by Arab-Moslems, didn't lift a finger to help its citizens. Israel is certainly not involved in that. The thousands whom Hafez Assad, the father of the current president of Syria, slaughtered in the city of Hama have no connection with Israel. Abdal Gamel Nasser, the self-appointed president of Egypt, mortal enemy of Israel and instigator of the Six-Day War, did not invade Yemen and gassed its people because of Israel. Saddam Hussein did not torture and kill tens of thousands of his own people and did not invade Kuwait because of Israel. The Lebanese did not stage their civil war and kill thousands of their own because of Israel. And there are many more examples of intra-Moslem or intra-Arab slaughter and mayhem. Israel was uninvolved in any of those. All of this would have taken place if Israel had never existed.

And how about terror? Again, many believe that Israel is the "root cause" of the terror that Arab-Moslems have visited and continue to visit upon the world. The attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, the destruction of the two U.S. embassies in West Africa, the bombing of trains in Spain, the murderous attacks on the London subway system, and so many other acts of cowardly terror would have taken place even if there were no Israel. And, many believe that if only the United States would withhold its support from Israel (and get out of Iraq), terror would cease and the world would no longer have to fear the scourge of suicide bombings, the devilish invention that Arab-Moslems have visited upon the people of the earth.

Many claim that Arab-Moslem terror is the result of despair, hopelessness, and poverty. But that is patently absurd. The Arabs are some of the richest people in the world, although, instead of using their enormous wealth to benefit their people, they squander it in bizarre luxury excesses for a privileged few. It is obvious nonsense that Arab-Moslem terror is the result of poverty. The nineteen hijackers were not poor or desperate. They were, without exception, well-educated people, members of upper-middle-class families. The leaders of such Arab-Moslem terror organizations as Hamas, Hezbollah or Islamic Jihad are educated people, from the upper reaches of their societies. And if hopelessness, deprivation of their "national rights," and poverty would give rise to terror, how come that, even in the worst and most evil days of Jim Crow, American Negroes never engaged in systematic terror against their white fellow citizens? How come Tibetans don't use terror against their Chinese overlords? How come the sub-Saharans of Sudan and other countries of Africa do not use terror against their Arab-Moslem oppressors? No, terror is the customary response of Arab-Moslems to express their grievances. It is a result of their culture and of their history. It has nothing to do with Israel and would not be any different if Israel had never existed.

The proclivity to war and to terror on the part of the Arab-Moslems has nothing or little to do with Israel. It is the result of their culture and of their history. It is a symptom of a crisis of identity and of confidence. For centuries, the historical Moslem empires of the Middle East were confident societies, which long led the despised Christian West in terms of science and economic well-being, as well as in military power. But then a lasting reversal and decline set in, in which the loss of Spain and the ascent of the West and its towering achievements in every human endeavor played a key role. This thirst for war against each other and against the hated infidels – foremost among them the Israelis – and the lust for terror will not end until Arab-Moslems come to terms with the West and accept its predominant role. But that may take a very long time – in fact, it may never happen.

This ad has been published and paid for by

FLAME

Facts and Logic About the Middle East
P.O. Box 590359 ■ San Francisco, CA 94159
Gerardo Joffe, President

FLAME is a tax-exempt, non-profit educational 501 (c)(3) organization. Its purpose is the research and publication of the facts regarding developments in the Middle East and exposing false propaganda that might harm the interests of the United States and its allies in that area of the world. Your tax-deductible contributions are welcome. They enable us to pursue these goals and to publish these messages in national newspapers and magazines. We have virtually no overhead. Almost all of our revenue pays for our educational work, for these clarifying messages, and for related direct mail.

To receive free FLAME updates, visit our website: www.factsandlogic.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

idate free will and identify its actual nature; to present an objective theory of concept formation, a problem that had plagued philosophers for over two millennia; to tie fully logic to reality; to present an objective theory of ethics based on life as the ultimate standard; to validate (rational) egoism and show the anti-life nature of altruism; to prove that rationality was the highest virtue; to give the concept of individual rights an objective foundation; and to provide a moral defense for capitalism. She also developed a totally original theory of aesthetics, including an objective definition of art.

As for Mr. Valiunas's claim that Rand is no longer a "commanding figure," the exact opposite is true. The sales of her books have increased dramatically in recent years. There are now twenty Objectivists teaching at universities (up from only two some fifteen years ago), and the demand for them has outstripped the current supply. There are nine Objectivist programs at universities (up from zero several years ago), and more are in the wings. New books presenting Rand's ideas are constantly being published. Her name has been mentioned favorably in Congress. A number of world leaders have read and admired her books. In short, she is commanding more respect than ever.

EDWIN A. LOCKE
Westlake Village, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Like too many critics, Algis Valiunas relies on tendentious accounts of Ayn Rand's personal life, misstates events in her novels and public life, and ignores much of the evidence that demonstrates Rand's importance, namely, her considerable nonfiction writing in such works as *The Virtue of Selfishness*, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, and *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. Whether or not one agrees with Rand's ideas, anyone familiar with the history of Western philosophy and with her own philosophy of Objectivism should recognize her as a major figure. But from Mr. Valiunas's article one does not learn any of the arguments she advanced to support her philosophical system. He describes her arguments as "half-truth and alluring lunacy" *without* ever presenting them.

Ayn Rand was a radical thinker, who originated a new philosophical system that defends the absolutism of reason. Because she focused on the essential issues in philosophy and offered alternatives to millennium-old views and assumptions in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics, her thought is of interest even to those it does not convince. Any serious student of fundamental ideas should take note of her arguments.

ONKAR GHATE
Ayn Rand Institute
Irvine, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Algis Valiunas expresses contempt for the reading public by smugly suggesting that the reason Ayn Rand's works continue to sell is merely that "there are certain effects she pulls off as well as anyone." He does not allow that almost 50 years after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, over 100,000 readers per year might still find her ideas compelling.

More than anything else, Ayn Rand was an effective proselytizer on behalf of philosophy in general. She showed how our explicit ideas and implicit assumptions about arcane questions translate into economic and political policies. That her own philosophy may have been incorrect in many places is unimportant; Rand could dramatize the relation of philosophy to practical life in a way that young people first discovering ideas would probably never see from reading F.A. Hayek or Karl Popper.

PETER COREY
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Algis Valiunas's essay on Ayn Rand is a smear job that says more about the state of American intellectuals today—particularly those of the Right—than it does about Rand or her philosophy of Objectivism.

During my years teaching *Atlas Shrugged* at a college in Ohio, I witnessed professors become unbuttoned psychologically when they learned that students were reading Rand's work. That virtually all liberals fear the influence of Rand's ideas is not surprising; *Atlas Shrugged* is arguably the most powerful critique of socialism ever written. But I saw even conservative professors intimidate and threaten students to prevent them from discussing her ideas. There is something in her philosophy that they fear. What is it? A few dislike Rand because she chose Athens over Jerusalem, reason over revelation. But there is something else.

Ayn Rand believed that America was the most moral society in world history. She also felt that the principles on which our country was founded were never properly defended philosophically from assaults by the likes of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. She therefore set out to defend reason, rational egoism, individual rights, constitutionalism, and capitalism as objectively true.

Unlike conservatives, Rand did not rely on faith (including "faith" in reason), tradition, or folksy speeches to defend America. Perhaps conservatives fear her because they do not think America is defensible philosophically.

C. BRADLEY THOMPSON
Clemson University
Clemson, South Carolina

TO THE EDITOR:

Algis Valiunas admits to relying on *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, "an admiring but clear-eyed biography by her disciple, Barbara Branden." Yet Branden and her ex-husband Nathaniel were thoroughly excoriated and ditched by Ayn Rand in 1968 after she learned of their deceptions and moral turpitude. To present Branden as an impartial, objective biographer is outrageous. After decades of Rand-bashing by the likes of Mr. Valiunas, James Valliant's *The Passion of Ayn Rand's Critics* has laid bare the Brandens' profoundly unjust characterization. Critics are now faced with the daunting task of having to read Rand's work firsthand.

EDWIN R. THOMPSON
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Judging by his article "Who Needs Ayn Rand?,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

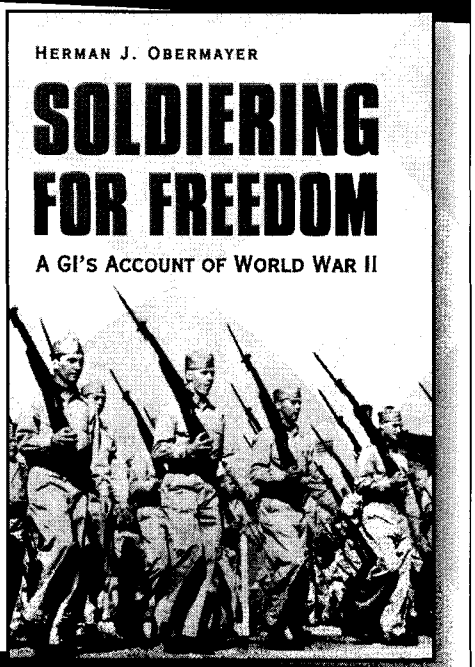
"As a young Jewish GI, he looked Goering in the eye and lived to tell about it. . . . Obermayer's story is a shining example of what Tom Brokaw called 'The Greatest Generation.'"—**BRIAN WILLIAMS**, anchor and managing editor, NBC Nightly News

SOLDIERING FOR FREEDOM

A GI's Account of World War II

HERMAN J. OBERMAYER

One of the few people alive today to have seen Hermann Goering, Rudolf Hess, and other leaders of the Third Reich, Obermayer wrote compellingly about the Nazis on trial at Nuremberg. He also expressed perplexity about his interest in Zionism during a time when Zionists in the Middle East were fighting the U.S.'s closest ally, the British. This Jewish GI's letters home offer a look at the human story of war behind the lines, while his reflective commentary sheds light on some of today's tough international issues. $32.95 cloth; $17.95 paper



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS
Orders: 800-826-8911 Fax: 888-617-2421
www.tamu.edu/upress

". . . will resonate with those who served at that time. And for those presently interested in the relation between an army of occupation and the residents of the occupied country, his story will prove equally informative."—**WILLIAM REHNQUIST**

Community Forum:

Should Arab Anti-Semitism

be on the

US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Agenda?

Join Congressmen, Jewish leaders, and Holocaust survivors in a community discussion of the Museum's agenda

Wednesday, January 18, 2006 at 7:30 pm

Ohev Sholom Talmud Torah--The National Synagogue
1600 Jonquil St NW Washington DC 20012

Sponsored by Coalition of Jewish Concerns—AMCHA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Algis Valiunas cannot get simple facts right and is a stranger to basic tools of research. Let me enumerate just a few of his factual errors. He claims that "in his youth" Alan Greenspan wrote for one of Ayn Rand's Objectivist publications. But Greenspan, born in 1926, was thirty-six when his first essay for Rand appeared. Youth indeed! Mr. Valiunas claims that Rand's novel *We the Living* was published in 1933; it actually appeared in 1936. He claims that "her educational foundation, the Ayn Rand Institute, helped spread the word," but the Institute was created only after her death in 1982.

Mr. Valiunas's claim that Ellsworth Toohey, the villain in *The Fountainhead*, hated the hero, Howard Roark, because of his "perfectionism," is an indication that Mr. Valiunas has never actually read the novel, as is his absurd claim that Gail Wynand was "regenerated" at the end of it. One need only take a look at the closing pages of chapter 19 to read about Wynand's total demoralization and despair. Discussing *Atlas Shrugged*, Mr. Valiunas refers to the "New Deal," to "virtual Stalinism," and to "Marxist imbeciles," terms that have no relevance at all to the novel, which he apparently has not read, either.

But Mr. Valiunas's greatest lapse of scholarship is his preposterous claim that Ayn Rand's "centenary has gone largely unmarked." In fact, more than 100 articles and a new biography have marked it, as anyone could easily discover by way of the Internet.

ROBERT HESSEN
Hoover Institution
Stanford, California

ALGIS VALIUNAS writes:

After one has cut through the Randites' rant and pettifoggery—I will admit to having gotten wrong the publication date of Ayn Rand's first novel—one serious question remains: the quality of her thought.

There is a crucial difference between being reasonable and having "unlimited faith in reason," as Rand had. Socrates, that paragon of reason, famously declared that he knew what he did not know; this awareness of reason's limitations distinguishes him from those pretending to knowledge they do not actually have. Rand is one of the pretenders: she believes—never proves—that human reason can answer every question, and that indeed her own philosophy does precisely that, once and for all. One can rave all one likes about her philosophical achievement, as her acolytes ceaselessly do, but the entire structure of her thought rests on a fundamental misconception. That misconception represents not only inadequate reasoning but the triumph of sloppy feeling over disinterested mind—the unpardonable failing in Rand's own estimation.

In fact, Rand's reasoning is founded on the very gobbledygook of imperious sentiment that she loathes as reason's nemesis. She cannot demonstrate by reason the non-existence of God: rather, her pride tells her there cannot be a God, for to acknowledge that a perfect Being exists would be to admit her own inferiority, something her emotional constitution makes unthinkable. So she thought—more precisely, so she felt—at the age of fifteen, when she decided she was an atheist, and, as I noted in my article, she never really refined her basic thoughts or feelings on the matter.

The glaring flaws in Rand's metaphysics are fatal to her ethical and political thinking as well. Human beings in her view are entirely "self-made souls": if there is no Creator, then man must be purely his own creation. But even reasonable atheists acknowledge that man is a creature who arrives on earth through no will of his own, and whose nature, both as a human being and as an individual, is circumscribed by genetic endowment and other inscrutable strokes of fate. Most individuals are of course responsible for their actions—there are exceptions among the mentally defective—but no man is sole master of his destiny.

That every man simply makes himself what he is by virtue of right or wrong reasoning, as Rand asserts, is a half-truth at best, and one that, as I showed, plunged her into ridiculous thought and sordid behavior. But Rand has no idea what being reasonable means, and no sense of men as creatures, each graced—whether by chance or design—with his own particular gifts, lacking others he may wish he had, and subject to all the pains of his individual nature and of human nature. That is why her world has the moral clarity of horse opera, with all the heroes on her side and all the villains on the other.

As a champion of American democracy, finally, Rand is blind to the foremost democratic virtue, namely, compassion. She claims that reason scorns compassion, but that which she despises is in fact rooted in human rationality. Compassionate men of faith accept their gifts as an obligation to help others less gifted, while compassionate agnostics or atheists recognize that chance has a great deal to do with their own excellence, achievement, and prosperity, and, at best, they pity those whom fortune has not dealt with so generously.

There are of course reasonable limits to compassion: no one can be held responsible for everyone else, nearly everyone must bear some degree of responsibility for his own condition, and some individuals are so depraved by their own choices that they deserve no compassion from others. But Rand sees compassion as simply evil, an unreasonable obstacle to the pursuit of happiness by nature's aristocrats, who owe everything to themselves and nothing to anyone else. In this sense, too, her failure as a writer and thinker is her failure as a human being, and her idea of what life should be is inimical to life itself.

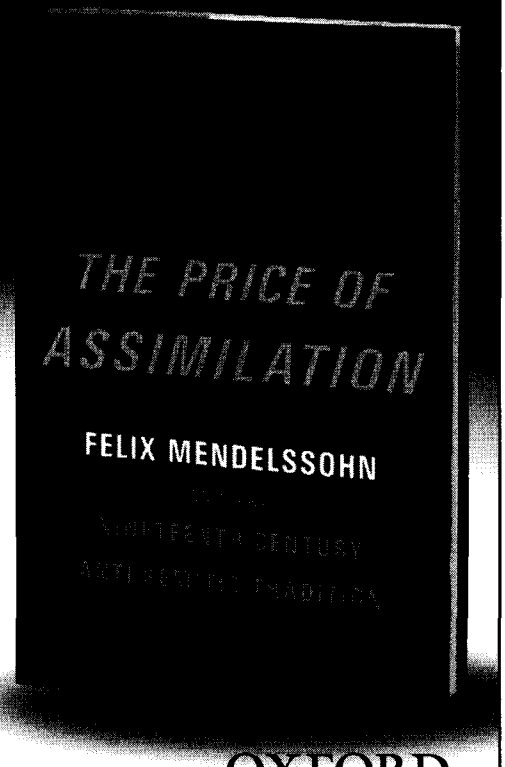
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A probing, impeccably researched investigation into Mendelssohn's sacred music and its subtext—the composer's mediation between his Judaic heritage and Protestant faith. Eloquently written and argued, *The Price of Assimilation* will encourage a fresh look at one of the most misunderstood, seminal figures of nineteenth-century music."

—R. Larry Todd, Professor of Music, Duke University

Since World War Two have assumed that composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847) maintained a strong attachment to Judaism throughout his lifetime. As these commentators have rightly noted, Mendelssohn was born Jewish and did not convert to Protestantism until age seven, his grandfather was the famous Jewish reformer and philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and his music was banned by the Nazis, who clearly viewed him as a Jew.

Such facts tell only part of the story, however. Through a mix of cultural analysis, biographical study, and a close examination of the libretto drafts of Mendelssohn's sacred works, *The Price of Assimilation* provides dramatic new answers to the so-called "Mendelssohn Jewish question."

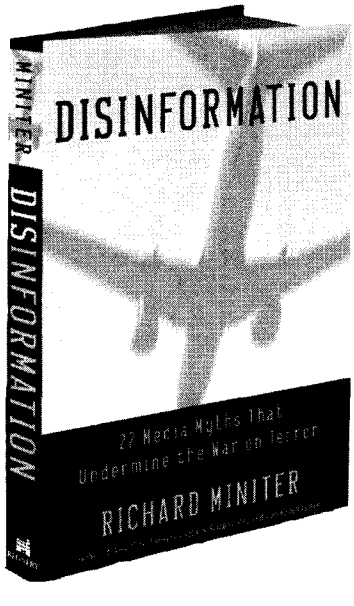


2005 $39.95

www.oup.com/us | OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

DISINFORMATION

Do You Know the Truth About the War on Terror?



Disinformation strikes at the heart of the liberal lie machine, putting a stop to the top twenty-two poisonous myths about terrorism, al Qaeda, and the war in Iraq.

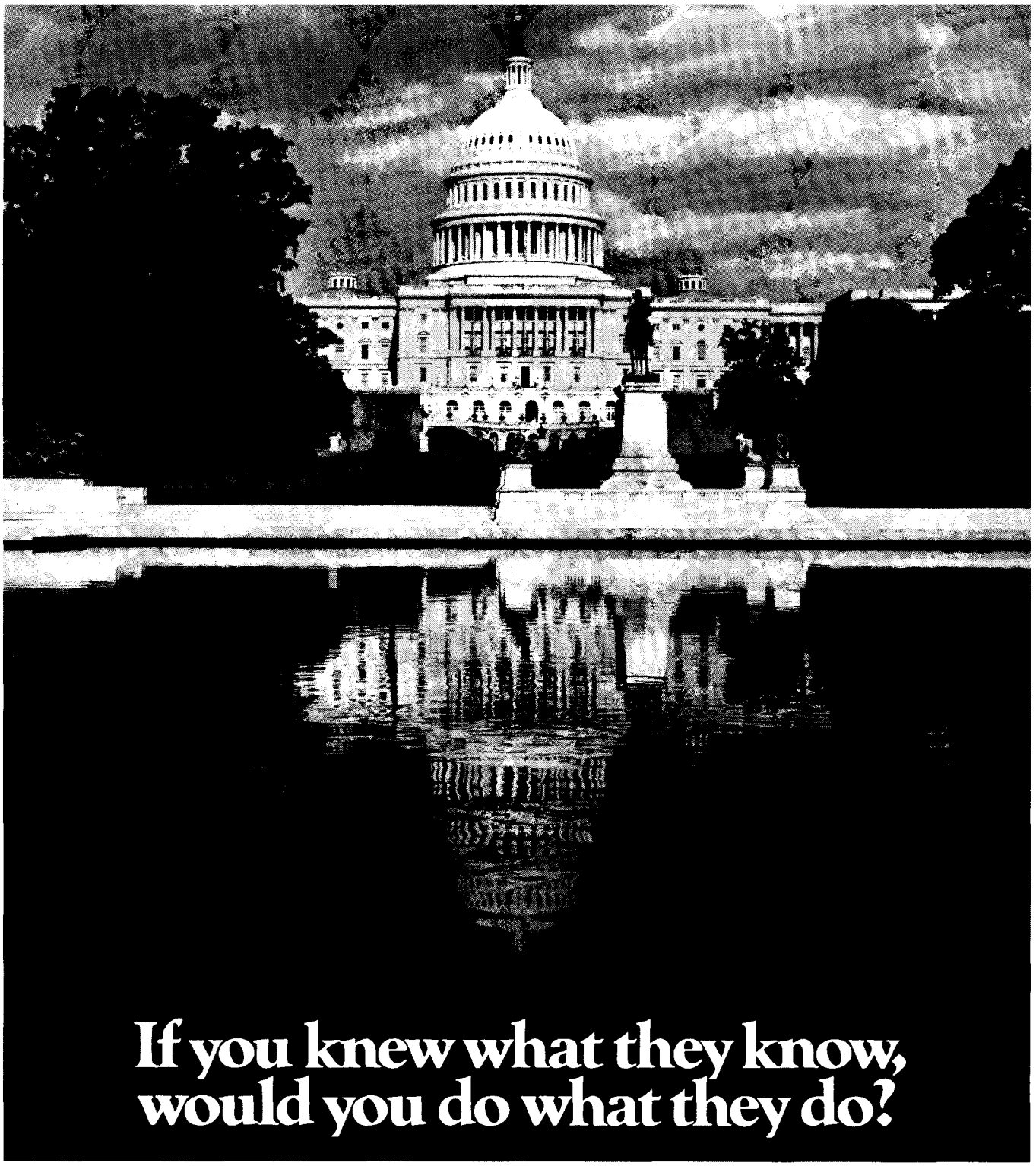
Veteran investigative reporter and terrorism expert Richard Miniter has sifted the written record, met with countless high-level sources, and traveled the globe, from Sudan to the Philippines, from Saudi Arabia to Hong Kong, and from Washington to Brussels to track down and refute some of the most widely believed—and often pernicious—War on Terror myths and legends.

If truth is the first casualty of war, urban legends seem to be the first product of America's War on Terror. ***Disinformation*** gives you the evidence—all the evidence—to shoot down disinformation and refute those who mindlessly repeat it. If you want the real truth about the War on Terror, you have to start here.

Since 1947
REGNERY PUBLISHING, INC.
An Eagle Publishing Company • Washington, DC
www.Regnery.com

Available in bookstores everywhere or by calling 1-888-219-4747
Please mention priority code CR15/C6833

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



If you knew what they know, would you do what they do?

More than any other single force on earth, America's foreign policy will determine what kind of world we and our children live in.

And every one of us can influence that policy. That's what the nonprofit, nonpartisan Foreign Policy Association is all about: working to develop the kind of informed public opinion that will help our government make enlightened, responsible foreign policy decisions.

Last year alone, more than 250,000 Americans across the nation—in discussion groups, classrooms and community centers—participated in our *Great Decisions* program.

The *Great Decisions* book provides objective background on eight key foreign policy issues. Discussions help you form your views; you express them on opinion ballots, which FPA presents to Washington officials.

FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION 1918

To find out more, call us at (212) 481-8100. Or write to Foreign Policy Association, Department A, 470 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016. Donations are tax deductible.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary
December 2005

Who Is Lying About Iraq?

Norman Podhoretz

AMONG THE many distortions, misrepresentations, and outright falsifications that have emerged from the debate over Iraq, one in particular stands out above all others. This is the charge that George W. Bush misled us into an immoral and/or unnecessary war in Iraq by telling a series of lies that have now been definitively exposed.

What makes this charge so special is the amazing success it has enjoyed in getting itself established as a self-evident truth even though it has been refuted and discredited over and over again by evidence and argument alike. In this it resembles nothing so much as those animated cartoon characters who, after being flattened, blown up, or pushed over a cliff, always spring back to life with their bodies perfectly intact. Perhaps, like those cartoon characters, this allegation simply cannot be killed off, no matter what.

Nevertheless, I want to take one more shot at exposing it for the lie that it itself really is. Although doing so will require going over ground that I and many others have covered before, I hope that revisiting this well-trodden terrain may also serve to refresh memories that have grown dim, to clarify thoughts that have grown confused, and to revive outrage that has grown commensurately dulled.

THE MAIN "lie" that George W. Bush is accused of telling us is that Saddam Hussein possessed an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, or WMD as they have invariably come to be called. From this followed the subsidiary "lie" that Iraq under Saddam's regime posed a two-edged mortal threat. On the one hand, we were informed, there was a distinct (or even "imminent") possibility that Saddam himself would use these weapons against us and/or our allies; and on the other hand, there was the still more dangerous possibility that he would supply them to terrorists like those who had already attacked us on 9/11 and to whom he was linked.

This entire scenario of purported deceit has been given a new lease on life by the indictment in late October of I. Lewis (Scooter) Libby, then chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney. Libby stands accused of making false statements to the FBI and of committing perjury in testifying before a grand jury that had been convened to find out who in the Bush administration had "outed" Valerie Plame, a CIA agent married to the retired ambassador Joseph C. Wilson, IV. The supposed purpose of leaking this classified information to the press was to retaliate against Wilson for hav-

NORMAN PODHORETZ *is the editor-at-large of* COMMENTARY *and the author of ten books. The most recent,* The Norman Podhoretz Reader, *edited by Thomas L. Jeffers, appeared in 2004. His essays on the Bush Doctrine and Iraq, including "World War IV: How It Started, What It Means, and Why We Have to Win" (September 2004) and "The War Against World War IV" (February 2005), can be found at www.commentarymagazine.com.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing "debunked" (in his words) "the lies that led to war."

Now, as it happens, Libby was not charged with having outed Plame but only with having lied about when and from whom he first learned that she worked for the CIA. Moreover, Patrick J. Fitzgerald, the special prosecutor who brought the indictment against him, made a point of emphasizing that

> [t]his indictment is not about the war. This indictment is not about the propriety of the war. And people who believe fervently in the war effort, people who oppose it, people who have mixed feelings about it should not look to this indictment for any resolution of how they feel or any vindication of how they feel.
>
> This is simply an indictment that says, in a national-security investigation about the compromise of a CIA officer's identity that may have taken place in the context of a very heated debate over the war, whether some person—a person, Mr. Libby—lied or not.

No matter. Harry Reid, the Democratic leader in the Senate, spoke for a host of other opponents of the war in insisting that

> [t]his case is bigger than the leak of classified information. It is about how the Bush White House manufactured and manipulated intelligence in order to bolster its case for the war in Iraq and to discredit anyone who dared to challenge the President.

Yet even stipulating—which I do only for the sake of argument—that no weapons of mass destruction existed in Iraq in the period leading up to the invasion, it defies all reason to think that Bush was lying when he asserted that they did. To lie means to say something one knows to be false. But it is as close to certainty as we can get that Bush believed in the truth of what he was saying about WMD in Iraq.

How indeed could it have been otherwise? George Tenet, his own CIA director, assured him that the case was "a slam dunk." This phrase would later become notorious, but in using it, Tenet had the backing of all fifteen agencies involved in gathering intelligence for the United States. In the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of 2002, where their collective views were summarized, one of the conclusions offered with "high confidence" was that

> Iraq is continuing, and in some areas expanding its chemical, biological, nuclear, and missile programs contrary to UN resolutions.

The intelligence agencies of Britain, Germany, Russia, China, Israel, and—yes—France all agreed with this judgment. And even Hans Blix—who headed the UN team of inspectors trying to determine whether Saddam had complied with the demands of the Security Council that he get rid of the weapons of mass destruction he was known to have had in the past—lent further credibility to the case in a report he issued only a few months before the invasion:

> The discovery of a number of 122-mm chemical rocket warheads in a bunker at a storage depot 170 km southwest of Baghdad was much publicized. This was a relatively new bunker, and therefore the rockets must have been moved there in the past few years, at a time when Iraq should not have had such munitions. . . . They could also be the tip of a submerged iceberg. The discovery of a few rockets does not resolve but rather points to the issue of several thousands of chemical rockets that are unaccounted for.

Blix now claims that he was only being "cautious" here, but if, as he now also adds, the Bush administration "misled itself" in interpreting the evidence before it, he at the very least lent it a helping hand.

SO, ONCE again, did the British, the French, and the Germans, all of whom signed on in advance to Secretary of State Colin Powell's reading of the satellite photos he presented to the UN in the period leading up to the invasion. Powell himself and his chief of staff, Lawrence Wilkerson, now feel that this speech was the low point of his tenure as Secretary of State. But Wilkerson (in the process of a vicious attack on the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of Defense for getting us into Iraq) is forced to acknowledge that the Bush administration did not lack for company in interpreting the available evidence as it did:

> I can't tell you why the French, the Germans, the Brits, and us thought that most of the material, if not all of it, that we presented at the UN on 5 February 2003 was the truth. I can't. I've wrestled with it. [But] when you see a satellite photograph of all the signs of the chemical-weapons ASP—Ammunition Supply Point—with chemical weapons, and you match all those signs with your matrix on what should show a chemical ASP, and they're there, you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> have to conclude that it's a chemical ASP, especially when you see the next satellite photograph which shows the UN inspectors wheeling in their white vehicles with black markings on them to that same ASP, and everything is changed, everything is clean. . . . But George [Tenet] was convinced, John McLaughlin [Tenet's deputy] was convinced, that what we were presented [for Powell's UN speech] was accurate.

Going on to shoot down a widespread impression, Wilkerson informs us that even the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) was convinced:

> People say, well, INR dissented. That's a bunch of bull. INR dissented that the nuclear program was up and running. That's all INR dissented on. They were right there with the chems and the bios.

In explaining its dissent on Iraq's nuclear program, the INR had, as stated in the NIE of 2002, expressed doubt about

> Iraq's efforts to acquire aluminum tubes [which are] central to the argument that Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear-weapons program. . . . INR is not persuaded that the tubes in question are intended for use as centrifuge rotors . . . in Iraq's nuclear-weapons program.

But, according to Wilkerson,

> The French came in in the middle of my deliberations at the CIA and said, we have just spun aluminum tubes, and by God, we did it to this RPM, et cetera, et cetera, and it was all, you know, proof positive that the aluminum tubes were not for mortar casings or artillery casings, they were for centrifuges. Otherwise, why would you have such exquisite instruments?

In short, and whether or not it included the secret heart of Hans Blix, "the consensus of the intelligence community," as Wilkerson puts it, "was overwhelming" in the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq that Saddam definitely had an arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, and that he was also in all probability well on the way to rebuilding the nuclear capability that the Israelis had damaged by bombing the Osirak reactor in 1981.

Additional confirmation of this latter point comes from Kenneth Pollack, who served in the National Security Council under Clinton. "In the late spring of 2002," Pollack has written,

> I participated in a Washington meeting about Iraqi WMD. Those present included nearly twenty former inspectors from the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), the force established in 1991 to oversee the elimination of WMD in Iraq. One of the senior people put a question to the group: did anyone in the room doubt that Iraq was currently operating a secret centrifuge plant? No one did. Three people added that they believed Iraq was also operating a secret calutron plant (a facility for separating uranium isotopes).

No wonder, then, that another conclusion the NIE of 2002 reached with "high confidence" was that

> Iraq could make a nuclear weapon in months to a year once it acquires sufficient weapons-grade fissile material.[1]

BUT THE consensus on which Bush relied was not born in his own administration. In fact, it was first fully formed in the Clinton administration. Here is Clinton himself, speaking in 1998:

> If Saddam rejects peace and we have to use force, our purpose is clear. We want to seriously diminish the threat posed by Iraq's weapons-of-mass-destruction program.

Here is his Secretary of State Madeline Albright, also speaking in 1998:

> Iraq is a long way from [the USA], but what happens there matters a great deal here. For the risk that the leaders of a rogue state will use nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons against us or our allies is the greatest security threat we face.

Here is Sandy Berger, Clinton's National Security Adviser, who chimed in at the same time with this flat-out assertion about Saddam:

> He will use those weapons of mass destruction again, as he has ten times since 1983.

Finally, Clinton's Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, was so sure Saddam had stockpiles of WMD that he remained "absolutely convinced" of

[1] Hard as it is to believe, let alone to reconcile with his general position, Joseph C. Wilson, IV, in a speech he delivered three months after the invasion at the Education for Peace in Iraq Center, offhandedly made the following remark: "I remain of the view that we will find biological and chemical weapons and we may well find something that indicates that Saddam's regime maintained an interest in nuclear weapons."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it even after our failure to find them in the wake of the invasion in March 2003.

Nor did leading Democrats in Congress entertain any doubts on this score. A few months after Clinton and his people made the statements I have just quoted, a group of Democratic Senators, including such liberals as Carl Levin, Tom Daschle, and John Kerry, urged the President

> to take necessary actions (including, if appropriate, air and missile strikes on suspect Iraqi sites) to respond effectively to the threat posed by Iraq's refusal to end its weapons-of-mass-destruction programs.

Nancy Pelosi, the future leader of the Democrats in the House, and then a member of the House Intelligence Committee, added her voice to the chorus:

> Saddam Hussein has been engaged in the development of weapons-of-mass-destruction technology, which is a threat to countries in the region, and he has made a mockery of the weapons inspection process.

This Democratic drumbeat continued and even intensified when Bush succeeded Clinton in 2001, and it featured many who would later pretend to have been deceived by the Bush White House. In a letter to the new President, a number of Senators led by Bob Graham declared:

> There is no doubt that . . . Saddam Hussein has invigorated his weapons programs. Reports indicate that biological, chemical, and nuclear programs continue apace and may be back to pre-Gulf war status. In addition, Saddam continues to redefine delivery systems and is doubtless using the cover of a licit missile program to develop longer-range missiles that will threaten the United States and our allies.

Senator Carl Levin also reaffirmed for Bush's benefit what he had told Clinton some years earlier:

> Saddam Hussein is a tyrant and a threat to the peace and stability of the region. He has ignored the mandate of the United Nations, and is building weapons of mass destruction and the means of delivering them.

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton agreed, speaking in October 2002:

> In the four years since the inspectors left, intelligence reports show that Saddam Hussein has worked to rebuild his chemical- and biological-weapons stock, his missile-delivery capability, and his nuclear program. He has also given aid, comfort, and sanctuary to terrorists, including al-Qaeda members.

Senator Jay Rockefeller, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, agreed as well:

> There is unmistakable evidence that Saddam Hussein is working aggressively to develop nuclear weapons and will likely have nuclear weapons within the next five years. . . . We also should remember we have always underestimated the progress Saddam has made in development of weapons of mass destruction.

Even more striking were the sentiments of Bush's opponents in his two campaigns for the presidency. Thus Al Gore in September 2002:

> We know that [Saddam] has stored secret supplies of biological and chemical weapons throughout his country.

And here is Gore again, in that same year:

> Iraq's search for weapons of mass destruction has proven impossible to deter, and we should assume that it will continue for as long as Saddam is in power.

Now to John Kerry, also speaking in 2002:

> I will be voting to give the President of the United States the authority to use force—if necessary—to disarm Saddam Hussein because I believe that a deadly arsenal of weapons of mass destruction in his hands is a real and grave threat to our security.

PERHAPS MOST startling of all, given the rhetoric that they would later employ against Bush after the invasion of Iraq, are statements made by Senators Ted Kennedy and Robert Byrd, also in 2002:

> *Kennedy*: We have known for many years that Saddam Hussein is seeking and developing weapons of mass destruction.
>
> *Byrd*: The last UN weapons inspectors left Iraq in October of 1998. We are confident that Saddam Hussein retains some stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, and that he has since embarked on a crash course to build up his chemical- and biological-warfare capabilities. Intelligence reports indicate that he is seeking nuclear weapons.[2]

[2] Fuller versions of these and similar statements can be found at http://www.theconversationcafe.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-3134.htmland. Another source is http://www.rightwingnews.com/quotes/demsonwmds.php.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Liberal politicians like these were seconded by the mainstream media, in whose columns a very different tune would later be sung. For example, throughout the last two years of the Clinton administration, editorials in the *New York Times* repeatedly insisted that

> without further outside intervention, Iraq should be able to rebuild weapons and missile plants within a year [and] future military attacks may be required to diminish the arsenal again.

The *Times* was also skeptical of negotiations, pointing out that it was

> hard to negotiate with a tyrant who has no intention of honoring his commitments and who sees nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons as his country's salvation.

So, too, the *Washington Post*, which greeted the inauguration of George W. Bush in January 2001 with the admonition that

> [o]f all the booby traps left behind by the Clinton administration, none is more dangerous—or more urgent—than the situation in Iraq. Over the last year, Mr. Clinton and his team quietly avoided dealing with, or calling attention to, the almost complete unraveling of a decade's efforts to isolate the regime of Saddam Hussein and prevent it from rebuilding its weapons of mass destruction. That leaves President Bush to confront a dismaying panorama in the Persian Gulf [where] intelligence photos . . . show the reconstruction of factories long suspected of producing chemical and biological weapons.[3]

ALL THIS should surely suffice to prove far beyond any even unreasonable doubt that Bush was telling what he believed to be the truth about Saddam's stockpile of WMD. It also disposes of the fallback charge that Bush lied by exaggerating or hyping the intelligence presented to him. Why on earth would he have done so when the intelligence itself was so compelling that it convinced everyone who had direct access to it, and when hardly anyone in the world believed that Saddam had, as he claimed, complied with the sixteen resolutions of the Security Council demanding that he get rid of his weapons of mass destruction?

Another fallback charge is that Bush, operating mainly through Cheney, somehow forced the CIA into telling him what he wanted to hear. Yet in its report of 2004, the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee, while criticizing the CIA for relying on what in hindsight looked like weak or faulty intelligence, stated that it

> did not find any evidence that administration officials attempted to coerce, influence, or pressure analysts to change their judgments related to Iraq's weapons-of-mass-destruction capabilities.

The March 2005 report of the equally bipartisan Robb-Silberman commission, which investigated intelligence failures on Iraq, reached the same conclusion, finding

> no evidence of political pressure to influence the intelligence community's pre-war assessments of Iraq's weapons programs. . . . [A]nalysts universally asserted that in no instance did political pressure cause them to skew or alter any of their analytical judgments.

Still, even many who believed that Saddam did possess WMD, and was ruthless enough to use them, accused Bush of telling a different sort of lie by characterizing the risk as "imminent." But this, too, is false: Bush consistently *rejected* imminence as a justification for war.[4] Thus, in the State of the Union address he delivered only three months after 9/11, Bush declared that he would "not wait on events while dangers gather" and that he would "not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer." Then, in a speech at West Point six months later, he reiterated the same point: "If we wait for threats to materialize, we will have waited too long." And as if that were not clear enough, he went out of his way in his State of the Union address in 2003 (that is, three months before the invasion), to bring up the word "imminent" itself precisely in order to repudiate it:

> Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late. Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option.

[3] These and numerous other such quotations were assembled by Robert Kagan in a piece published in the *Washington Post* on October 25, 2005.

[4] Whereas both John Edwards, later to become John Kerry's running mate in 2004, and Jay Rockefeller, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, actually did use the word in describing the threat posed by Saddam.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What of the related charge that it was still another "lie" to suggest, as Bush and his people did, that a connection could be traced between Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaeda terrorists who had attacked us on 9/11? This charge was also rejected by the Senate Intelligence Committee. Contrary to how its findings were summarized in the mainstream media, the committee's report explicitly concluded that al Qaeda did in fact have a cooperative, if informal, relationship with Iraqi agents working under Saddam. The report of the bipartisan 9/11 commission came to the same conclusion, as did a comparably independent British investigation conducted by Lord Butler, which pointed to "meetings . . . between senior Iraqi representatives and senior al-Qaeda operatives."[5]

WHICH BRINGS us to Joseph C. Wilson, IV and what to my mind wins the palm for the most disgraceful instance of all.

The story begins with the notorious sixteen words inserted—after, be it noted, much vetting by the CIA and the State Department—into Bush's 2003 State of the Union address:

> The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.

This is the "lie" Wilson bragged of having "debunked" after being sent by the CIA to Niger in 2002 to check out the intelligence it had received to that effect. Wilson would later angrily deny that his wife had recommended him for this mission, and would do his best to spread the impression that choosing him had been the Vice President's idea. But Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times*, through whom Wilson first planted this impression, was eventually forced to admit that "Cheney apparently didn't know that Wilson had been dispatched." (By the time Kristof grudgingly issued this retraction, Wilson himself, in characteristically shameless fashion, was denying that he had ever "said the Vice President sent me or ordered me sent.") And as for his wife's supposed non-role in his mission, here is what Valerie Plame Wilson wrote in a memo to her boss at the CIA:

> My husband has good relations with the PM [the prime minister of Niger] and the former minister of mines . . . , both of whom could possibly shed light on this sort of activity.

More than a year after his return, with the help of Kristof, and also Walter Pincus of the *Washington Post*, and then through an op-ed piece in the *Times* under his own name, Wilson succeeded, probably beyond his wildest dreams, in setting off a political firestorm.

In response, the White House, no doubt hoping to prevent his allegation about the sixteen words from becoming a proxy for the charge that (in Wilson's latest iteration of it) "lies and disinformation [were] used to justify the invasion of Iraq," eventually acknowledged that the President's statement "did not rise to the level of inclusion in the State of the Union address." As might have been expected, however, this panicky response served to make things worse rather than better. And yet it was totally unnecessary—for the maddeningly simple reason that every single one of the sixteen words at issue was *true*.

That is, British intelligence *had* assured the CIA that Saddam Hussein had tried to buy enriched uranium from the African country of Niger. Furthermore—and notwithstanding the endlessly repeated assertion that this assurance has now been discredited—Britain's independent Butler commission concluded that it was "well-founded." The relevant passage is worth quoting at length:

> a. It is accepted by all parties that Iraqi officials visited Niger in 1999.
>
> b. The British government had intelligence from several different sources indicating that this visit was for the purpose of acquiring uranium. Since uranium constitutes almost three-quarters of Niger's exports, the intelligence was credible.
>
> c. The evidence was not conclusive that Iraq actually purchased, as opposed to having sought, uranium, and the British government did not claim this.

AS IF that were not enough to settle the matter, Wilson himself, far from challenging the British report when he was "debriefed" on his return from Niger (although challenging it is what he now never stops doing[6]), actually strengthened the CIA's belief in its accuracy. From the Senate Intelligence Committee report:

[5] In early November, the Democrats on the Senate Intelligence Committee, who last year gave their unanimous assent to its report, were suddenly mounting a last-ditch effort to take it back on this issue (and others). But to judge from the material they had already begun leaking by November 7, when this article was going to press, the newest "Bush lied" case is as empty and dishonest as the one they themselves previously rejected.

[6] Here is how he put it in a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* written in late October of this year to celebrate the indictment of Libby: "I knew that the statement in Bush's speech . . . was not true. I knew it was false from my own investigative trip to Africa. . . . And I knew that the White House knew it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> He [the CIA reports officer] said he judged that the most important fact in the report [by Wilson] was that Niger officials admitted that the Iraqi delegation had traveled there in 1999, and that the Niger prime minister believed the Iraqis were interested in purchasing uranium.

And again:

> The report on [Wilson's] trip to Niger . . . did not change any analysts' assessments of the Iraq-Niger uranium deal. For most analysts, the information in the report lent more credibility to the original CIA reports on the uranium deal.

This passage goes on to note that the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research—which (as we have already seen) did not believe that Saddam Hussein was trying to develop nuclear weapons—found support in Wilson's report for its "assessment that Niger was unlikely to be willing or able to sell uranium to Iraq." But if so, this, as the Butler report quoted above points out, would not mean that Iraq had not *tried* to buy it—which was the only claim made by British intelligence and then by Bush in the famous sixteen words.

The liar here, then, was not Bush but Wilson. And Wilson also lied when he told the *Washington Post* that he had unmasked as forgeries certain documents given to American intelligence (by whom it is not yet clear) that supposedly contained additional evidence of Saddam's efforts to buy uranium from Niger. The documents did indeed turn out to be forgeries; but, according to the Butler report,

> [t]he forged documents were not available to the British government at the time its assessment was made, and so the fact of the forgery does not undermine [that assessment].[7]

More damning yet to Wilson, the Senate Intelligence Committee discovered that he had never laid eyes on the documents in question:

> [Wilson] also told committee staff that he was the source of a *Washington Post* article . . . which said, "among the envoy's conclusions was that the documents may have been forged because 'the dates were wrong and the names were wrong.'" Committee staff asked how the former ambassador could have come to the conclusion that the "dates were wrong and the names were wrong" when he had never seen the CIA reports and had no knowledge of what names and dates were in the reports.

To top all this off, just as Cheney had nothing to do with the choice of Wilson for the mission to Niger, neither was it true that, as Wilson "confirmed" for a credulous *New Republic* reporter, "the CIA circulated [his] report to the Vice President's office," thereby supposedly proving that Cheney and his staff "knew the Niger story was a flatout lie." Yet—the mind reels—if Cheney had actually been briefed on Wilson's oral report to the CIA (which he was not), he would, like the CIA itself, have been *more* inclined to believe that Saddam had tried to buy yellowcake uranium from Niger.

So much for the author of the best-selling and much acclaimed book whose title alone—*The Politics of Truth: Inside the Lies that Led to War and Betrayed My Wife's CIA Identity*—has set a new record for chutzpah.

BUT THERE is worse. In his press conference on the indictment against Libby, Patrick Fitzgerald insisted that lying to federal investigators is a serious crime both because it is itself against the law and because, by sending them on endless wild-goose chases, it constitutes the even more serious crime of obstruction of justice. By those standards, Wilson—who has repeatedly made false statements about every aspect of his mission to Niger, including whose idea it was to send him and what he told the CIA upon his return; who was then shown up by the Senate Intelligence Committee as having lied about the forged documents; and whose mendacity has sent the whole country into a wild-goose chase after allegations that, the more they are refuted, the more they keep being repeated—is himself an excellent candidate for criminal prosecution.

And so long as we are hunting for liars in this area, let me suggest that we begin with the Democrats now proclaiming that they were duped, and that we then broaden out to all those who in their desperation to delegitimize the larger policy being tested in Iraq—the policy of making the Middle East safe for America by making it safe for democracy—have consistently used distortion, misrepresentation, and selective perception to vilify as immoral a bold and noble enterprise and to brand as an ignominious defeat what is proving itself more and more every day to be a victory of American arms and a vindication of American ideals.

—November 7, 2005

[7] More extensive citations of the relevant passages from the Butler report can be found in postings by Daniel McKivergan at www.worldwidestandard.com. I have also drawn throughout on materials cited by the invaluable Stephen F. Hayes in the *Weekly Standard*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Storm Over Katrina

Wilfred M. McClay

We are so constituted that we believe the most incredible things; and, once they are engraved upon the memory, woe to him who would endeavor to erase them.

—Goethe, 1774

As the flood waters have receded from the drowned city of New Orleans, and the immense destructive effects of Hurricane Katrina from general awareness, a number of more detached and dispassionate evaluations of the crisis have begun to filter through. These point to conclusions radically at odds with what we were told at the time, which by now has assuredly engraved itself on the memories of countless millions of Americans. But if we mean to learn anything useful from those terrible events, we need to attend carefully to the reassessments, and to disenthrall ourselves of much of what we think we know.

To begin with, it is now clear that, as calamitous as were the hurricane's effects, things could have been a great deal worse. It might seem both bizarre and callous to contend that New Orleans got off easy from Katrina, but there is a measure of truth in it. Katrina turned out *not* to be the apocalyptic "big one" that has always haunted the New Orleans imagination—"not even close," according to Hassan Mashriqui of the Hurricane Center at Louisiana State University. Nor is Mashriqui alone in arguing that human factors, beyond and apart from the sheer power of the storm, were what turned "a problem into a catastrophe."

By the time Katrina actually arrived in New Orleans on the morning of August 29, its intensity had probably dropped to that of a Category 3 hurricane—still formidable, but not nearly so cataclysmic as a Category 4 or 5. In addition, the eye of the storm had veered to the east of the city, so that the worst of its cyclonic fury and accompanying surge would be felt on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where towns like Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis would suffer complete obliteration. In the initial hours after the storm itself had passed through New Orleans, there was a wide feeling of relief that the old rogue city might once again have dodged the fatal bullet, as it had just a year before with the careening monster called Ivan, and with so many storms in the past.

Had it not been for breaches in three different levees after Katrina's concentrated fury had passed, the city would likely have experienced only scattered flooding and wind damage—serious in places, but not catastrophic. It was the failure of these three bulwarks that transformed Katrina from an ordinary hurricane into the most expensive natural disaster in American history. According to three different teams of investigators, all

Wilfred M. McClay, *who was on the faculty of Tulane University in New Orleans from 1987 to 1999, now teaches history and humanities at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. His article, "Bush's Calling," appeared in our June issue.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three failures were likely caused by inadequate design or faulty construction.

The failure of the 17th Street and London Avenue drainage canals on the lakefront side of town, whose rupture led to the flooding of much of the city, seems to have occurred not because waters from Lake Pontchartrain topped the levees, as was first believed, but because the peaty soil deep beneath the concrete floodwalls had become saturated and was pushed out of place by the surging waters, thereby causing the concrete structures above them to collapse. Given the nature of the problem, any pre-Katrina effort to raise the existing levees to a greater height would merely have magnified the likelihood of collapse. What might have worked would have been supporting piles sunk much farther into the earth, perhaps to a depth of 40 feet or more. But this would have entailed a project of mammoth expense—just such a project as will have to be considered in any calculation of the cost of rebuilding New Orleans and rendering it safe.

The failure of the Industrial Canal, by contrast, which led to the inundation of the city's Ninth Ward and outlying St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes, seems to have been caused, or at least significantly worsened, by a powerfully concentrated storm surge that was directed up the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. This was a possibility that had worried engineers from the moment the Outlet, an underutilized and immensely expensive navigational shortcut, was completed in 1965.

All three of these projects were the work of the Army Corps of Engineers, undertaken decades ago and funded by the federal government. Since engineering or construction failures rather than inadequate funding seem to be at the root of the problem, the Corps will likely end up with much of the blame. But even when the Corps has been successful, as in its taming of the Mississippi River after the legendary 1927 flood, its successes have always had a way of creating more problems.

Most notably, the armoring of the river's banks in the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project (established in 1928), along with ever higher levees and the creation of spillways and reservoirs to regulate river flows, has led to the erosion of Louisiana's coastal marshes, which serve as an important buffer against marauding Gulf hurricanes, and to the steady subsidence of the city of New Orleans itself. Neither locale was any longer being replenished, as in the past, by the Big Muddy's constant supply of silt deposits, swept downriver from the upper Midwestern states.

The point here is that the mere physical setting of New Orleans—subtropical and soggy, lying mostly below sea level, steadily sinking, surrounded by large, powerful, and unpredictable bodies of water, and subject to tropical heat, tropical diseases, and violent tropical storms—is and will always remain challenging in the extreme. It is a comment on the fragility of the place that, as bad as Katrina was, it could easily have been far worse—which means that things far worse will have to be envisioned and planned for if the city is to be rebuilt.

There is a case to be made for that rebuilding, as for New Orleans in general. There is a case for the city's economic importance as a key American port. And there is a historical and cultural case for preserving so unique an American city; indeed, declining to do so could be seen as an admission of national failure. But any effort commanding widespread support will have to proceed on the basis of sober and disinterested realism, with complete honesty about the risks, and costs, and tradeoffs involved.

And there's the rub: in the fractious atmosphere of contemporary American public discourse, sober and disinterested realism seems well on the way to becoming extinct. In particular, our understanding of what happened with Katrina has been so tainted and distorted by sensationalism, emotional oversimplification, and ideological opportunism that it may require a miracle for Americans to think through clearly what needs to be done.

Perhaps the foremost culprit in this regard are the mainstream mass media. If one had no evidence beyond the wild journalistic coverage of events as they were unfolding, one would have thought that the fury and carnage of Hurricane Katrina, and the widespread suffering in its aftermath, rather than representing what used to be called an "act of God," could be blamed entirely on the crimes of commission and omission perpetrated by political leaders, and chiefly President George W. Bush.

It is striking how quickly the "blame game" and the manipulation of angry emotion became a conspicuous part of the many dozens of television images hauntingly depicting the violence and squalor and vulnerability into which so many New Orleanians were plunged by the catastrophic events around them. Here is a portion of an interview with Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, conducted by Anderson Cooper of the Cable News Network on September 1:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cooper: Senator, I'm sorry . . . for the last four days, I have been seeing dead bodies here in the streets . . . and to listen to politicians thanking each other and complimenting each other—I have to tell you, there are people here who are very upset and angry, and when they hear politicians thanking one another, it just, you know, it cuts them the wrong way right now, because there was a body on the streets of this town yesterday being eaten by rats because this woman has been laying in the street for 48 hours, and there is not enough facilities to get her up. Do you understand that anger?

Landrieu: I have the anger inside of me. Most of the homes in my family have been destroyed. I understand that, and I know all the details, and the President—

Cooper: Well, who are you angry at?

Surrounded by devastation and suffering, the star reporter homed in on what was, to him, the most urgent consideration of all: *who are you angry at*? That, indeed, was the question of the hour. Hardly had the rain stopped falling on the unlucky Gulf Coast than the search was on for certifiable villains. The game was in motion, and the very stones and waters cried out for vengeance.

In the campaign to score political points, an impressive litany of charges was assembled in record time. The severity of the storm itself was said to have been caused by global warming, which Bush had notoriously refused to address, and by the erosion of the southern Louisiana wetlands, alleged to have been caused principally by the rapaciousness of his fat-cat developer friends. The breaks in the levees were the result of inadequate funding from the Bush administration, including a cut in the most recent budget for the Army Corps of Engineers. The violence in the streets, the grim living conditions at the last-resort shelters in the Superdome and Convention Center, and the plight of unrescued citizens waving desperately from the rooftops of their submerged homes in the Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish—all these were attributed to the tardy and inadequate federal response to the storm, stemming from the fact that needed National Guard troops had been deployed in Iraq (another Bush crime) and from incompetent management of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by a Bush crony, not to mention FEMA's having been placed under the Department of Homeland Security, an indication of the administration's overemphasis upon terrorism to the exclusion of natural-disaster relief. Worst of all, Bush was caught lollygagging on vacation at his ranch in Texas and was unconscionably late to respond to the crisis publicly.

And so on. Everywhere they looked, the media found George Bush's fingerprints all over Katrina.

IN FAIRNESS, one has to grant that Bush did poorly in the first test of symbolic leadership: the need to appear before the public quickly and decisively and reassuringly. But none of the other accusations was deserved, and in sum they amount to one of the most breathtaking bum raps in memory.

There is, for example, no way that the Bush administration or anyone in it can be held responsible for the levee failures. As for the inadequate response to Katrina, no doubt it will turn out that FEMA deserves some limited portion of the blame; but FEMA is a relatively small agency with only about 2,500 full-time employees, and its chief purpose is to assist in the coordination of work by other public and private agencies. In any case, chief responsibility rests not with Washington but with the state and local officials who are, in the American system of government, rightly tasked with the bulk of emergency planning and first response to crises of this kind.

If villains are to be sought, then, they have to be sought among officials like Kathleen Blanco, the hapless Louisiana governor who was late in ordering an evacuation, late in requesting federal troops, and late in getting the Louisiana National Guard onto the street, who declined to permit President Bush to federalize rescue and relief efforts, and whose own Louisiana Department of Homeland Security inexplicably barred the Red Cross from bringing water, food, and health supplies to the stricken New Orleanians camped out on bridge overpasses and in the two megashelters. Or Ray Nagin, the mayor of New Orleans, who also waited too long to evacuate and failed to implement the city's own evacuation plan—which, as officials knew, was the only real defense the city had against catastrophic storms—allowing hundreds of municipal school buses under his direct control to sit idly in a parking lot.

And the other charges? It is widely agreed that we are currently in an active hurricane cycle, and that such cycles have little or nothing to do with recent atmospheric temperatures, let alone the Kyoto Accords. Nor did Bush and his "friends"—in Democratic Louisiana!—have anything to do with the conditions that have led over several decades to the erosion of the wetlands. There were,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also, plenty of National Guard troops available in New Orleans, and they were deployed far more rapidly there than in previous instances; in 1992, when Homestead, Florida, was flattened in a devastating Category 5 strike by Hurricane Andrew, deployment took five days rather than three.

There is no doubt that conditions in the Superdome and the Convention Center were terrible, given the lack of power, ventilation, sanitation, and food and water. But the stories that came out of those places were the stuff of X-rated horror or disaster movies, as scripted by Thomas Hobbes. It was said that evacuees were firing upon helicopters trying to rescue them, and killing those around them for food and water. There were stories of women, children, and even babies being raped, of dead bodies being stacked in a freezer. Police officers were said to be involved in repeated shootouts with heavily armed gang members inside the two buildings; outside, snipers were reportedly firing from rooftops and high-rises at doctors and soldiers. The dead lay piled everywhere.

Such lurid impressions did much to shape the public perception of events, and of the federal government's supposed culpability for them. Four weeks later, however, according to the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "few of the widely reported atrocities have been backed with evidence. . . . [M]ost of the worst crimes reported at the time never happened." Living conditions for the thousands awaiting evacuation from the Superdome and Convention Center, while extremely difficult and unpleasant, were nothing like the descriptions of apocalyptic violence being bandied about by the media.

And then there were the racial accusations. Because the non-evacuees who sought shelter at the Superdome and Convention Center were overwhelmingly poor and black, news coverage quickly and deliberately fostered the suspicion that the slowness of relief efforts could be traced, not to the massiveness of the storm or the confusion of local and state officials, but to an undercurrent of racism in the nation at large and the White House in particular.

Various public officials played upon this theme shamelessly for the avid benefit of the cameras. Mayor Nagin speculated that if what was happening in heavily black New Orleans had happened in Miami or Los Angeles or Chicago, "we would have had everything we need." The Rev. Al Sharpton proclaimed that "Bush is James Crow, Jr.," and that "broken levees are weapons of mass destruction." Louis Farrakhan suggested that the levees were deliberately exploded, by whites who wished to drive blacks out of the city. In a particularly appalling statement, the activist Randall Robinson declared that "black hurricane victims in New Orleans have begun eating corpses to survive," and that this news meant "the end of the America I strove for."

Perhaps the most notorious of such statements came from Congressman Charles Rangel of New York, who told a town meeting held by the Congressional Black Caucus that "George Bush is our Bull Connor," a reference to the Birmingham, Alabama police commissioner who unleashed attack dogs and turned water hoses on peaceful civil-rights protesters in 1963. Rangel's comparison was met with wild cheers and sustained applause from those present; they included his fellow speakers Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, and the conference's two co-chairmen, Danny Davis of Illinois and Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas. Not only did none of these prominent Democrats disavow Rangel's remarks, but Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, dismissed a request to do so by his Republican counterpart, Ken Mehlman, with a taunt: "I think the chairman of the RNC ought to be embarrassed for what his party has done to America the last five years. . . . It ought to be Mehlman that's apologizing."

Need one point out that this effort to make political hay out of the racial theme was likewise wholly meretricious? Not only were the mayor, police chief, and many other public officials in New Orleans themselves black, but the flow of aid to the city from federal and state government, and from charitable organizations like the Salvation Army and Red Cross, was massive and steady from the start. The death toll in the city, which had been predicted to be as high as 10,000, turned out to be a tenth of that number for the whole state of Louisiana, thanks to well-organized rescue efforts by helicopters from the Coast Guard, Air Force, Army, and Air National Guard, as well as the truly remarkable feats of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, whose boats managed to carry an estimated 20,000 people to safety.

Moreover, significant racial disparities in the rates of death simply did not materialize. The breakdown of the recovered bodies at the St. Gabriel morgue has been roughly equal as between whites and blacks, reflecting their roughly equal numbers in the larger metropolitan area. The levee breaches were not caused by explosions, and well-to-do whites living in the city's Lakeview area were just as badly affected by them as were blacks living

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the Ninth Ward. Nor was race a factor in any delay that occurred in providing food and water at the two megashelters. To the contrary, according to Major Ed Bush of the Louisiana National Guard, who was present at the Superdome for eight straight days, unsubstantiated reports circulating in the media had the entirely predictable effect of hyping hysteria and keeping away fearful rescue workers, along with additional sources of aid.

THUS DID the news media, and in particular the hotdogs of television, make themselves not merely a nuisance but an important contributing factor to the very problem they were reporting on. Not, of course, that they saw it that way. The coverage of Katrina was "one of television news's finest moments," crowed CBS ex-anchorman Dan Rather, a past master of hotdoggery, adding that "covering hurricanes is something I know something about."

Rather thrilled to the sight of reporters like Cooper who "were willing to speak truth to power." But in light of the astonishing level of inaccuracy in what was reported, one would have to say instead that this was one of television news's *worst* moments, an exceptionally shameful performance made all the more so by the self-congratulation that accompanied and followed it.

In what is becoming a routine of news reporting, some web-based bloggers and blogsites were quick to expose the falsity and bias that pervaded much of the work of the mainstream media, to be followed in due course by print media like the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, which eventually detailed the extent of the journalistic errors made. But the damage had been done. Although Bush's strong speech to the nation from a deserted Jackson Square on the night of September 15 did much to reverse the perception of him, and won him high marks even from evacuees living in the Houston Astrodome, the instant litany of charges and complaints was successful in giving decisive shape to public understanding of the event.

A determination to build on that success has marked, as well, the political aftermath of Katrina. Thus, in the view of George Lakoff, the Democratic party's guru of political semantics, a "framing war" needs to be fought over Katrina's lessons. The hurricane, he declared, has clearly demonstrated "the intellectual bankruptcy of modern conservatism," with its emphasis on small government, low taxes, and strong defense. Not only have conservative policies, in Lakoff's reading, stripped government of the power to deal with disaster, but conservative values are "just plain un-American," for this is a country "where people pull together in the face of disaster."

How, then, are Democrats to prevent Republicans from closing "the framing gap" and "parlay[ing] this disaster into an even bigger power grab than they made out of September 11"? By fighting back, paying attention to the "deep framing" of the issues at "the level of values and principles," and answering the "sink-or-swim" mentality of conservatives with the liberal emphasis on "shared sacrifice" (Lakoff's preferred term for higher taxes).

Given conservative complaints about the Bush administration's big-government propensities, not to mention its munificent response to Katrina, Lakoff's sink-or-swim caricature seems rather desperately out of touch with reality. But his analysis does accurately reflect the Democratic hope that an event like Katrina, especially in combination with other perceived Republican stumblings, could yet serve as a means of redefining an unfavorable political landscape and of taking back the moral high ground that liberalism has manifestly lost over the years. That hope may not be completely unfounded. Bush, for his part, seems determined to thwart this by doing whatever it takes, and spending whatever it takes, to maintain a huge federal role in the post-Katrina reconstruction.

The federal government is providing support for hundreds of thousands of housing units—shelters, mobile homes, public housing, hotels, motels, mortgage initiatives—through a variety of programs. It has sent 1,500 health professionals and 50 tons of medical supplies into the afflicted areas, and is funding 26 new health centers. It is seeking the creation of a Gulf Opportunity Zone and of Work Recovery Accounts to stimulate employment in the region. It aims to provide extensive federal funds for school districts burdened by displaced children. And that is not even to take account of the funding for the physical reconstruction of the city, three-quarters of the cost of which is federally obligated under the terms of the 1988 Stafford Act.

IF THERE is a danger here, it lies in an opposite direction from the one perceived by George Lakoff. It is that the convergence of political factors, including Louisiana's legendary appetite for federal pork, not to mention the presence of real needs that can only be addressed by federal resources, will conspire to turn the post-Katrina rebuilding into an orgy of haphazard and wasteful spending.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poured in an uncontrolled and unsupervised way into the notoriously corrupt political culture of south Louisiana, such spending will almost certainly do more harm than good, abetting the same disinclination to make responsible choices that got us where we are today. Precisely because Katrina was *not* the "big one," there is still an opportunity to do things more nearly right in the reconstruction of New Orleans. Yet, given the current political atmosphere, and with the mass media playing so consequential a role in helping to push Democratic ambitions, there is good reason to question our ability to negotiate the path from opportunity to achievement.

Consider, for example, the issue of whether or not the "new" New Orleans should include a reconstructed Lower Ninth Ward, or whether the area should be allowed to revert to swampland. This may be the single most difficult of the many decisions facing those beginning to think about the shape of the post-Katrina city.

For the foreseeable future, all signs point to a much smaller New Orleans, stabilizing at perhaps half its pre-Katrina population. As many as 250,000 houses are unlivable at present, and many of the city's former inhabitants have emphatically declared their unwillingness to return. The largely black and poor Lower Ninth Ward was especially hard hit, as it often has been in the past, and there is literally almost no structure left in it worth preserving.

Hence the starkness of the choice—either demolish the entire neighborhood and rebuild on a massive scale, or demolish it for the purpose of letting it return to the elements. The difficulty in deciding the case is not scientific or logistical. Craig E. Colten, a geographer at Louisiana State University, told the *Washington Post* flatly that the oft-flooded area "should not be put back in the real-estate market"; even if the former residents regarded such a decision as an insult to them, it would, he asserted, "be a far bigger insult to put them back in harm's way."

But detached and humane rationality of this kind will do nothing to contain the potentially explosive political reaction to any such decision, or the immense political price to be paid for abandoning a poor and black neighborhood as a place unworthy of preservation—particularly if, as seems all but certain, the Lakeview section and other predominantly white parts of the city are rebuilt. Action of this kind will surely lend credibility to the malicious charge, already voiced by the ever-alert Jesse Jackson, that the Katrina aftermath is being used as a way of "whitening" the population of New Orleans and thus changing Louisiana's "political order." In the face of such hardening dogmas, it is small wonder that Mayor Nagin has so far been noncommittal about the area's future.

But the mayor's immobilization also reflects the absence of good ideas about the city's future. Explaining his proposal to transform part of the central business district into a Las Vegas-style gambling strip, Nagin said, for example, "I'd like to have another solution for the citizens, but I don't know what else we can do at this point."

Nagin's lameness may well be a function of his own lack of imagination, but it is also a function of reality. New Orleans has lost so much of its economic base over the past half-century that, aside from the tourist industry, there is almost nothing left to it. Having for years traded on its mystique, now, with the chips down, the city finds itself with little else to sell.

It would, indeed, be hard to find a place in the United States that is more thoroughly enamored of its own myths about itself—its European provenance, its charming provincialism, its colorful locals, its sophistication, its naughtiness. New Orleans is a fatal magnet for overripe clichés and literary conceits, a city that thrives more on adjectives than on nouns. In its addiction to fancy, it is a little like Laura in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, stuck in a haze of unreality, waiting for imaginary gentlemen to call.

Anyone who has ever lived in New Orleans recognizes the state of mind that prevailed before Katrina. That something like this could happen, and probably would happen, was utterly common knowledge. Equally known was that local officials were too corrupt and incompetent to manage a catastrophe. But a combination of fatalism and denial, and a good stiff drink, always served to banish the reality principle. Spencer Williams's great 1926 song "Basin Street Blues" had more than one meaning to convey in calling New Orleans a "land of dreams."

The reality of New Orleans is something far less dreamy: a poor, hopelessly corrupt, racially tense, horrendously violent, and often ugly and disheveled city, with many more cases of peeling paint, rotten siding, imploding front porches, ratty-looking lawns, cracked sidewalks, and crumbling streets than of elegant mansions. A city whose police force is widely believed to be more dangerous than the criminals it protects against, and whose smokestack-era infrastructure is so old that in dri-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ving the overpasses and bridges one might easily imagine oneself back in the 1930's or 40's. A city that boasts of having more canals than Venice, but whose canals are little more than unkempt drainage ditches running alongside the major thoroughfares.

Of course, there is no point in denying that there is much to love in this land of dreams. Who could not be charmed by the battered green St. Charles Avenue streetcars that lumber through the lushly overgrown uptown neighborhoods like prehistoric beasts on the prowl? Or the many neighborhood restaurants, often looking like crack houses on the outside, that faithfully serve up the simple, superb local cuisine—New Orleans at its unpretentious best? One even learns to love the monsoon-like rains, particularly in the spring, that come up suddenly and flood the streets in a matter of minutes, leaving cars to scramble up onto the curbs, lawns, and neutral grounds for safety, forcing the whole city to put everything on hold, waiting for the streets to drain.

I remember getting caught in one of these sudden downpours while on my way home from a Tulane University graduation one May afternoon. Forced to pull my Toyota up onto someone's lawn on Prytania Street, I sat for three hours, still wearing my academic regalia, reading the one book that happened to be in the car with me: Miguel de Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life*. A classic New Orleanian moment, and one that only the most insensate rationalist could fail to cherish.

People like to be enveloped by lore, to feel they live in a storied place, where there are ghosts and skeletons in every closet and historical resonances in every street name. This has always been a big part of the appeal of New Orleans, particularly in an increasingly standardized and suburbanized America. The appeal is not merely aesthetic, but may be an important clue to a balance missing from much of modern American life.

But, as with other good things, there can be too much of it. New Orleans has too often been a casualty of its own myths—perhaps, most of all, the myth of its own superiority that it has habitually summoned forth in order to rationalize its inefficiency and improvidence. According to this idea, the city embodies what might be called the counter-Weber thesis: unencumbered by the Protestant ethic and the fetishes of modern efficiency, it offers a more exuberant, authentic, and satisfying mode of human existence.

Whatever is true in this idea depends on one's willingness to overlook the squalor and despair that have characterized the lives of all too many New Orleanians, not to mention the steady connivance of the Democratic political class in keeping them that way. Indeed, the very things that made the city seem so charming to the outside world served to obscure, and even perpetuate, the grinding poverty and futility of so much of the life within it. Now, thanks to Katrina, and for better or worse, the myth is no longer sustainable.

YET THERE is another, less obvious part of the myth that does deserve to survive, and that in its own way may have something to contribute to thinking about the city's future. As the story about my enforced sojourn on someone else's lawn during a May downpour illustrates, New Orleans is a city in which one has always been reminded, at every turn, in ways both banal and profound, of the degree to which existence itself is contingent, and human mastery an illusion. No one living for long in New Orleans can fail to understand this; it is a lesson that the city's limitations, and particularly its intimate contact with the power and terror of the elements, teaches very well.

This is emphatically not the lesson, however, that has been drawn from Katrina, or that undergirds much of the debate in its aftermath. When "someone" is always to blame for calamity, it must mean that everything untoward happening in the world can ultimately be attributed to the malfeasance of some human being or human agency, and can be fixed by some other human being or agency. We are, or should be, masters of our existence, and we should never tolerate real or perceived lapses in that mastery.

Lost in this view of things, sometimes fatally, is that increases in rational mastery over the physical terms of existence do not necessarily make us happier, or safer—and may even have the opposite effect. Consider the growing rage at our medical system and pharmaceutical industry, a system that has been remarkably skillful, and more so in every passing year, at addressing a range of diseases and conditions that were formerly thought to be untreatable. Modern medicine can do many astonishing things. But it cannot banish risk, which is why the medical system is all too often a casualty of the very expectations it raises.

The principle can be extended to other realms as well. The more things become mastered, the more intolerable are those remaining areas in which our mastery is not yet complete. This parallels very neatly the observation made by Tocqueville that times of revolutionary upheaval occur when social expectations are rising, and his prediction that the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

growth of social equality in America would exacerbate, rather than relieve, Americans' sense of class injury and class resentment.

It can only add to our already keen sense of grievance when we find that the areas eluding our mastery are likely to proliferate in years to come. Storms and earthquakes will continue, as will plagues and epidemics and accidents and other things beyond our control, including the appearance of drug-resistant strains of disease that we thought we had conquered. Even with the finest imaginable Department of Homeland Security, there may be other 9/11 attacks, other scares, poisonings of water systems, subway and bus and ship bombings, and instruments of terror that few of us can now imagine. The illusion of mastery has already made it hard for us to absorb the blow of such events in a mature way, and move beyond them productively. Instead, we spend more and more of our time asking ourselves, "Who are we angry at?"

This is precisely why any sensible planning for the future of New Orleans needs to take into account the inherent limitations of the place. There is no question that the city should be restored as much as possible and made as safe as possible. But the limits are very real, and cry out to be observed more respectfully than in the past. If it would be a colossal mistake, and a moral failure, to abandon New Orleans, it would be no less a mistake to assume that it can be made once and for all into a showcase of man's triumphant and risk-free conquest of nature. Not only is any such objective profoundly expensive and difficult to achieve, and bound to be put to tests it might well not pass, but "success" in the task is a fool's illusion—as New Orleans, at its best and at its worst, has always insisted on reminding us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Europe's "Good Jews"

Emanuele Ottolenghi

It is common knowledge that anti-Semitism in Western Europe has been on the rise for the last five years. Its frequency and intensity have coincided for the most part with the curve of violence in the Middle East, and with the incendiary and openly slanted way that this violence has been covered in the European media. But expressions of anti-Semitism have also taken on a life, and a momentum, of their own. Of course, Jews in Europe have not been deprived of property, expelled, or deported; but they have been subjected to physical violence, insults, libelous attacks in the press and in intellectual circles, accusations of disloyalty, and much else besides.

All of this has been thoroughly documented. Known, too, are the factors that have contributed to the astonishing recrudescence of a hatred thought to have been long uprooted from pluralist, tolerant Europe. Those factors include the open hostility of some European governments to the state of Israel and their active sympathy with the Arab and Palestinian "cause," even to the point of justifying Arab terrorism against civilian Israeli Jews; the felt need on the part of European elites to accommodate the often murderous anti-Semitism within the immigrant Muslim community; and the alignment of European leftist and "progressive" opinion behind the idea of Israel as the new Nazi Germany, according to which those European Jews who *support* Israel are relegated to the category of racists until proved otherwise.

To be sure, it is regularly and vigorously denied that contemporary hostility to Israel and its Jewish supporters is itself in the least bit anti-Semitic; rather, it is held to be solely an expression of disagreement with particular policies of the Israeli government. To draw a parallel between this and past variants of European anti-Semitism, especially of the Nazi type, is thus dismissed as a species of moral blackmail.

There is something to this argument, although not much, and then only when it is couched in such extreme terms. The Nazi card is a powerful rhetorical weapon, no matter who plays it—as the anti-Israel side, quick to condemn Israel itself as a replica of Nazi Germany, knows better than anyone. But to help put matters into historical perspective, I want to focus here on a particular feature of the new European anti-Semitism that has been less commented on. This is the crucial role played by some European Jews themselves, mostly intellectuals or academics, who have responded to the latest assault on the Jewish people by excusing it, justifying it, and in effect joining it.

In October 2002, a number of leading European authors discussed Israel's conduct in the pages of the London *Independent*. For one of these

Emanuele Ottolenghi, *who was born in Bologna, Italy, is a research fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, where he specializes in Israeli politics and the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is his first appearance in* Commentary.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

writers, it was plain that Israel had "adopted tactics which are reminiscent of the Nazis." For another, it was no less plain that the Israelis "were educated by the Nazis." And so it went. Such assertions, staples of Arab and Palestinian propaganda, have by now assumed canonical status in liberal European opinion.

But what, aside from rhetorical bombast, is meant by the term "Nazi" in such statements? Ultimately, the evil that Israel is said to embody is the evil of an extreme, aggressive, and racially exclusive nationalism—that is, the very same disease that Europe, in the aftermath of Hitler and the Holocaust, has sought so strenuously and with such success "to limit, transcend, and overcome" (in the flattering words of the historian Anatol Lieven). Now this great sickness is alleged to have returned in the lurid form of present-day Israel, throwing the whole world into turmoil and disturbing the hard-won tranquility of post-nationalist Europe by inflaming the passions of its rising Muslim population.

Hence the obsessive intensity with which European elites have focused on a territorial conflict that, in the scale of the world's problems, would seem rather less worthy of their concern, let alone of their one-sided rage, than many another. For, in the end, this is their conflict as well, involving as it does their own twisted and morally compromised history with the Jews. Involving—and perhaps mitigating. As I am hardly the first to have observed, Europeans have seized upon the Palestinian *intifada*, or rather upon Israel's determined response to it, as an opportunity at last to turn the moral tables, a chance, however specious, to hold not themselves but the Jews to account.

The Italian columnist Barbara Spinelli, writing in *La Stampa*, spelled out the charge a few years ago. Today's ultra-nationalist Israel, she wrote, constitutes nothing less than a "scandal." And it is a scandal, above all, for Jews themselves—since, as every European knows, Jews are the quintessential *victims* of modern nationalism (nationalism being, for Spinelli as for many other Europeans, virtually coterminous with Nazism). It follows, then, that Jews everywhere have a special duty to speak out against Israel, to apologize to *its* victims, and to do so in public.

"If one thing is missing in Judaism," Spinelli wrote in late 2001, "this is precisely it: a *mea culpa* vis-à-vis the peoples and individuals who had to pay the price of blood and exile to allow Israel to exist." She called upon world Jewry to undertake such an act of contrition forthwith:

> If the initiative does not come from Jerusalem then it should start in the Diaspora, where so many Jews live a double and contradictory loyalty: to Israel, and to the state they belong to and vote in. A solemn *mea culpa*, proclaimed from the scattered communities in the West. . . .

THIS CALL to Europe's "good Jews," as they might be called, has in fact been answered. For the most part, those answering it have been not the long-term, all-out, rabid haters of Israel of the Harold Pinter or (in American terms) Noam Chomsky stripe, who need no excuse and waste no pieties in reviling the Jewish state. Pinter, for example, who has termed Israel "the central factor in world unrest," and has accused it of using nuclear weapons against the Palestinians, hardly stoops to identifying himself as a Jew concerned for the welfare of his fellow Jews. Most "good Jews" are of a somewhat different complexion. Not only do they tend to speak more circumspectly but, with whatever degree of disingenuousness, they cloak their hostility to Jewish nationalism (i.e., Israel) in the mantle of solicitude for, precisely, the good name of Jews and Judaism.

Thus, writing in Britain's weekly *Spectator* earlier this year, one Anthony Lippman issued just such a *mea culpa* as Barbara Spinelli may have dreamed of. Himself the son of a Holocaust survivor, albeit a convert to Christianity and an active member of the Church of England, Lippman was moved temporarily to reclaim his patrimony. Writing under the title, "How I Became a Jew," he averred that the "little band" of Holocaust survivors in Europe

> has a terrible responsibility—to live well in the name of those who did not live and to discourage the building of walls and bulldozing of villages. Even more than this, they—and all Jews—need to be the voice of conscience that will prevent Israel from adopting the mantle of oppressor, and to reject the label "anti-Semite" for those who speak out against Israel's policies in the occupied territories.

Similarly responding to the claims of an awakened Jewish conscience has been the British academic Jacqueline Rose. In her book, *The Question of Zion* (2005), Rose undertakes to save Judaism itself from the curse of its movement of national liberation. "What is it," she asks, "about the coming into being of this nation [Israel] and the [Zionist] movement out of which it was born, that allowed it—and still allows it—to shed the burdens of its own history, and so flagrantly to blind itself?" Zionism, she concludes, has to be seen not as the fulfillment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of an age-old Jewish dream but as the out-and-out betrayal of Jewish history and the Jewish heritage, an adoption of all that is, historically and morally, un-Jewish.

CAN THE disease that is Zionism be cured? Yes, Rose and others assure us, but only by a thorough-going renunciation. In the pre-Israel past, she writes, "dissident voices" in the Jewish world warned against the terrible consequences that would flow from the effort to win a state for the Jews; although silenced and repressed then, they are needed more then ever today, during the Jews' "dark night of the soul."

No one can say that such voices have not been forthcoming. In the August 8, 2002 *Guardian*, 45 Jewish signatories, in a widely hailed act of public abjuration, repudiated their right of return to the Jewish state on account of its racist policies. Since the statement's original publication, it has been signed by over 80 more individuals from around the world. One of the organizers subsequently explained that what motivated him to act was the "pitiless violence" of his "blood relatives," i.e., the Israeli people—the "violence," as he put it, of the "traumatized former victim, clinging to past wounds from generation unto generation."

The publicity attending this and similar initiatives by European Jews, abetted in some cases by their Israeli counterparts, has been very great. There was tremendous excitement in Europe over the declaration by 99 Israeli academics that their government was planning an imminent "full-fledged ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinian people (a charge that was not withdrawn when the alleged genocidal atrocity failed to occur), and again over the refusal of a few hundred Israeli army reservists to serve in the administered territories. There was even greater excitement when several European Jewish academics turned up among the instigators of a movement to boycott Israeli academic institutions, and yet again when a number of Jewish politicians called for the boycott of Israeli commercial products.

Among the latter group was the British parliamentarian Oona King, who in June 2003, comparing Israel's treatment of Palestinians in Gaza with the Nazi treatment of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, spoke of her personal "shame" as a "Jewish person" (her father is Jewish). A year later, Gerald Kaufman, another member of the British Parliament, called for a boycott of Israeli goods on similar grounds, as, in South Africa, did Ronnie Kasrils, a government minister: "As a person who was born Jewish, I am morally obliged to speak out against what is being done by the Zionist state of Israel to the Palestinian people."

Many others have likewise seen it as their specifically Jewish duty to denounce Israel. Their ranks include all three proponents of a motion, "Zionism is the real enemy of the Jews today," aired at a public debate in London early this year. One of them was the historian Avi Shlaim. Like others before him, he too felt the need to advertise his Jewish virtuousness by writing about it for publication. In a subsequent op-ed in the *International Herald Tribune*, he justified the implacable anti-Zionism on which he has based his academic career by appealing to a faith he does not appear ever to have practiced: "One of the greatest accolades in Judaism," he instructed his readers, "is to be a *rodef shalom*, a seeker of peace."

THE ASSERTIONS of Jews like these are often buttressed by a particular narrative of the history of Zionism. The narrative itself has been thoroughly debunked,* but here I want to concentrate less on its veracity or rather lack of it than on the terms in which its main thesis is often expressed. These are revealing.

According to this reconstruction of the past, the achievements of Zionism involved, for the Jews, a fatal loss of moral and historical innocence. In order for the state of Israel to be born in 1948, unspeakable crimes were committed against the Palestinian people. Zionist leaders then entered into a conspiracy of silence to conceal these awful events from the Jewish public. Not until the 1980's did a small, intrepid band of scholars—Israel's so-called New Historians—emerge to uncover the evidence and expose the hidden truth.

Zionism's precipitous descent, from the noble liberal vision of Theodor Herzl to the obloquy of mass expulsions and worse, was characterized in 1988 by Benny Morris, a leading New Historian, in striking language:

> How one perceives [Israel's war of independence in] 1948 bears heavily on how one perceives the whole Zionist/Israeli experience. If Israel, the haven of a much-persecuted people, was born pure and innocent, then it is worthy of the grace, material assistance, and political support showered upon it by the West over the past 40 years—and worthy of more of the same

* For example, see, in COMMENTARY, Shabtai Teveth, "Charging Israel with Original Sin" (September 1989) and Efraim Karsh, "Were the Palestinians Expelled?" (July 2000) and "Revisiting Israel's 'Original Sin'" (April 2003).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in years to come. If, on the other hand, Israel was born tarnished, besmirched by original sin, then it was no more deserving of that grace and assistance than were its neighbors.

"Grace," "purity," "original sin"—Christological vocabulary of this kind recurs frequently in the rhetoric of certain scholarly and journalistic discussions of Israel's birth. Avi Shlaim, for instance, has mocked those who persist in conceiving of Israel's War of Independence as a struggle against Arab aggression. They hold, he writes with savage sarcasm, to the idea of "an immaculate conception." Worse, they do so perfidiously, for both material and moral gain, thus aspiring to the roles of Judas and Jesus simultaneously:

> [They] put so much store by Israel's claim to moral rectitude that they cannot face up to the evidence of cynical Israeli double-dealings or brutal dispersal and dispossession of the Palestinians. It is an axiom of their narrative that Israel is the innocent victim. *Not content with the thirty pieces of silver, these people insist on retaining for Israel the crown of thorns.* [emphasis added]

But, if the brutality with which Israel is charged was indeed inherent to the project that led to its creation—as the notion of original sin suggests—how can it possibly be made good? That European Jews should wash their hands of the Jewish state goes without saying. But what is required of Israel itself? For this there is an answer as well. Both logically and, as it were, theologically, the only remedy lies in the political equivalent of conversion.

For Israel, in this analysis, entrance into a new life of grace is contingent on shedding its identity as the Jewish national state. Instead, it must agree to a unitary, binational arrangement with the Palestinians. Only thus might the state of the Jews yet wash away the stain of its original sin.

The signatories of the 2002 letter in the *Guardian* were explicit on this point. No mere condemnation of Israel's allegedly brutal behavior would satisfy the demands of their Jewish conscience. What was necessary was the dissolution of Israel itself, its place to be taken by a new entity that would no longer be ruled by Jews but in which Jews and Palestinian Arabs would at last live together peacefully as equals.

OF COURSE, this is absurd—a fancy-dress rewording of longstanding Arab propaganda about the illegitimacy of Israel's national existence. It is also hypocritical: Europeans who expend such vast quantities of energy lecturing Israel on its supposed hypernationalist instincts give no thought whatsoever to ridding the Arabs of their own, rather more vivid, forms of nationalist sentiment. But for those European Jews who embrace the modish conviction that nationalism is not just a sin but the root of all modern evil, the fantasy of Israel's de-nationalization serves another purpose. It ensures their own conformity with the latest European thinking on the best way for human beings to organize themselves in society—namely, as good Europeans.

Such, at any rate, was the burden of a notorious 2003 essay by Tony Judt, a British historian now living in the U.S. For Judt, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, contemporary European anti-Semitism, insofar as it exists, has been the wholly foreseeable result of bad Jewish (that is, Israeli) behavior. And just as the Jews of Israel have only themselves to blame for the fact that the enlightened world condemns them, so they can relieve their suffering, and incidentally that of their fellow Jews around the world who have been implicated in their black deeds, through compensatory acts of self-effacement and re-dedication.

Here, in Judt's words, is the root sin of which Israel is guilty:

> In a world where nations and peoples increasingly intermingle and intermarry at will; where cultural and national impediments to communication have all but collapsed; where more and more of us have multiple elective identities and would feel falsely constrained if we had to answer to just one of them; in such a world Israel is truly an anachronism. And not just an anachronism but a dysfunctional one.

And here, again in Judt's words, is the path to remission from sin:

> To convert Israel from a Jewish state to a binational one would not be easy, though not quite as impossible as it sounds: the process has already begun de facto. But it would cause far less disruption to most Jews and Arabs than its religious and nationalist foes will claim.

The use of the word "convert" is again no accident.

IN SEEKING to explain the seemingly obsessive need for Jewish self-negation that is on display in examples like these and others, psychologists of the future will have their work cut out for them. And if we were dealing with only a few anti-Zionist Jews impelled to act out their personal identity problems in public, we could safely leave them to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

those future psychologists. Unfortunately, even though such individuals are not many in number, and even though their arguments are invariably mendacious and easily refuted, they, and the many grouplets that have sprung up to represent them, enjoy great acclaim in today's Europe, and together they have done incalculable damage by lending a Jewish imprimatur to the anti-Israel cause.*

One evening last spring, the UK branch of Peace Now hosted a debate on the Israel-Palestinian conflict at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Taking the Israeli side, ironically enough, was Benny Morris, the pioneer New Historian. (In recent years Morris has found himself at odds with some of his colleagues since he still supports Israel's right to exist; he has also begun to entertain second and third thoughts on the issue of Zionism's "original sin.") Opposing him was Ahmed Khalidi, a Western-educated scion of Palestinian aristocracy and a "moderate" who is willing to negotiate Israel's demise diplomatically rather than advocating its destruction through violence.

During the question-and-answer period, a frail student stood up to make an impassioned plea. "I want to express my gratitude to you, Dr. Khalidi," said this young woman, "for your willingness to share Palestine with the Jews as a common patrimony." ("Common patrimony" was the anodyne catchphrase Khalidi had coined to promote his one-state solution, i.e., the dissolution of Israel.) Such conspicuous, large-hearted charity, the student went on, heedless of her choice of ancient religious antinomies, stood in sharp contrast to the miserly approach of Benny Morris, who had insisted on Israel's right to continue its national existence. "As a Jew," she concluded her address to Khalidi, "I feel ashamed that your land was taken away from you in my name and that of my ancestors. It is my duty as a Jew to stand up for justice." If indeed she stood up in shame, she sat down to thunderous applause.

In statements like this, one cannot but notice the recurrence not only of those enduring theological tropes but of a certain very dangerous dance in which European Jews have long participated. Today, as yesterday, Jewish "particularism," then religious, now national, remains a thorn in Europe's side. Today, as yesterday, removing the thorn involves a renunciation of particularism followed by an espousal of the regnant form of universal salvation—then Christianity, now the tenets of humanistic liberalism.

This is not 1930's-style anti-Semitism; in that narrow sense, anti-Israel Europeans are correct in protesting that they are not anti-Semites. Nevertheless, it is an age-old form of anti-Semitism, and one that has always called forth a typical pattern of response on the part of the Jews under scrutiny. For most, the choices are to lie low in hopes that the trouble will pass, to pick up and seek life elsewhere, or to resist and oppose to the extent they can. We have seen all three responses in European Jewish society over the last years, each bearing its cost. Some, however, take a different route, finding favor and reward by exerting every effort to assimilate themselves to whatever is required of them, including to the point of publicly dissociating themselves from their people's history and fate. As ever with such maneuvers, exculpatory rationalizations must be found, and are readily at hand.

UNLIKE THE case in pre-Enlightenment Europe, present-day anti-Semitism does not expect Jews to abandon their religion. Today's Europe is a self-consciously multicultural society. Although it cherishes secularism above all, it respects, if somewhat warily, religious pluralism. What the enlightened sector of today's Europe would like Jews to do, in exchange for fully approved membership in the circle of approved opinion, is to renounce a core component of their identity: that is, their sense of Jewish peoplehood as expressed through their attachment and commitment to the democratic state of Israel and to the Zionist enterprise.

What remains constant is that, as in both pre- and post-Enlightenment Europe, today's European elite has its good Jews and its bad Jews. There are the Jews whom it embraces, encourages, and celebrates; and then there are the Jews whom it chastises and condemns. For the former, there will always be a place of honor in the European sun. On the latter, today's officially pluralist and tolerant Europe has turned its back. Is it any wonder, then, that some "good Jews" have chosen to live in the light, stopping only to burnish their qualifications by noisily joining the chorus that has consigned their fellow Jews to the dark?

* The groups, with names like Jews for Justice for Palestinians (UK), Jewish Union for Peace (France), Network of Jews against Occupation (Italy), Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East (Germany), New Outlook (Denmark), Another Jewish Voice (Netherlands), and so forth, even have their own umbrella organization, European Jews for a Just Peace.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The First Genocide of the 20th Century?

Guenter Lewy

THE TERM "genocide," coined in 1944 by the Polish-Jewish émigré lawyer Raphael Lemkin, was meant to describe Hitler's then-ongoing campaign to exterminate the Jews of Europe. But Lemkin's interest in this most heinous of crimes—what he and others would define as the planned effort to destroy an entire people or ethnic group—long predated the rise of the Nazis. The atrocities that first drew him to the issue emerged from a different world war and a different context. They were the vicious actions not of Germans against Jews in the early 1940's but of Ottoman Turks against Turkey's Armenian minority in 1915-16.

Today, however, the Armenian case remains controversial in a way that the Holocaust, outside the fevered confines of the Arab world, does not. Like every one of its predecessors since the rise of modern Turkey, the current government in Ankara vehemently rejects the charge of genocide, and has exerted strong diplomatic pressure against any attempt by outsiders to place the events of World War I in a class with Hitler's Final Solution. In this, the Turks have been seconded not just by pro-Turkish apologists but by a number of respected historians, including, most notably, Bernard Lewis, the dean of American Orientalists and an expert on Turkey.

Against this view is the great tide of world opinion, from the official proclamations of various governments and religious bodies to the declared consensus of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. Indeed, so strong is sentiment on this question that even now, nearly a century after the fact, the issue continues to color Turkey's dealings with other nations. On September 29, the European parliament in Strasbourg adopted a resolution demanding that, as a condition of admission to the European Union, Turkey acknowledge the mass killing of its Armenians during World War I as an instance of genocide. And even beyond the issue of what happened in 1915-16 and its relevance to Turkey's political situation today, the Armenian case continues to occupy a place of precedence in the litany of all subsequent instances of mass murder and "ethnic cleansing," including most recently the killings in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Rwanda in the 1990's and those in Sudan today.

No one, it should be stressed, disputes the extent of Armenian suffering at the hands of the Turks. With little or no notice, the Ottoman government forced Armenian men, women, and children to leave their historic communities; during the subsequent harrowing trek over mountains and through deserts, large numbers of them died of starvation and disease, or were murdered. Although the ab-

GUENTER LEWY *is the author of, among other works,* The Catholic Church & Nazi Germany, Religion & Revolution, America in Vietnam, *and* The Cause that Failed: Communism in American Political Life. *His new book,* The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide, *is forthcoming from the University of Utah Press.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sence of good statistics on the size of the pre-war Armenian population in Turkey makes it impossible to establish the true extent of the loss of life, reliable estimates put the number of deaths at more than 650,000, or around 40 percent of a total Armenian population of 1.75 million.

The historical question at issue is premeditation—that is, whether the Turkish regime intentionally organized the annihilation of its Armenian minority. According to the Genocide Convention of 1948, such an intent to destroy a group is a necessary condition of genocide; most other definitions of this crime of crimes similarly insist upon the centrality of malicious intent. Hence the crucial problem to be addressed is not the huge loss of life in and of itself but rather whether the Turkish government deliberately sought the deaths that we know to have occurred.

THE ARMENIANS have lived in the southern Caucasus, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, since ancient times. In the early 4th century C.E., they were the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion. Much of their long history, however, has been spent under foreign rule. The last independent Armenian state (before the present-day, post-Soviet Republic of Armenia) fell in 1375, and by the early 16th century most Armenians were subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Under the *millet* system instituted by Sultan Mohammed II (1451-1481), they enjoyed religious, cultural, and social autonomy as a "loyal community," a status that lasted well into the 19th century.

Though large numbers of Armenians settled in Constantinople and in other Ottoman towns, where they prospered as merchants, bankers, and artisans, the majority continued to live as peasants in eastern Anatolia. During the autocratic rule of Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909), the lot of the Armenians deteriorated, and nationalistic sentiment began to emerge. In June 1890, Armenian students in the Russian-controlled area of the Caucasus organized the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Demanding the political and economic emancipation of Turkish Armenia, the Dashnaks (as they were known) waged guerrilla warfare against Turkish army units, gendarmerie posts, and Kurdish villages involved in attacks on Armenians. They operated from bases in the Caucasus and Persia and took advantage of eastern Anatolia's mountainous terrain.

When, in 1908, the nationalist, modernizing movement known as the Young Turks seized power in Constantinople in a bloodless coup, the Dashnaks declared an end to their fighting. But the truce did not last. With Turkey's entry into World War I on the side of Germany and against Russia, the Armenians' traditional ally, the Dashnaks resumed their armed resistance. By April 1915, Armenian guerrilla activities had picked up momentum. Roads and communication lines were cut. Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador in Constantinople, reported to Washington on May 25 that nobody put the Armenian guerrillas "at less than 10,000, and 25,000 is probably closer to the truth."

Meanwhile, the Russian branch of the Dashnaks was organizing volunteers to fight the Turks on the Caucasus front. Most of these volunteers—numbering 15,000, according to one Armenian source—were themselves Russian subjects, exempt from military service, but some of them were Turkish Armenians who had crossed the border to join the volunteer units. Offers of help also poured in from the Armenian diaspora, from as far away as Western Europe and the U.S.

In March 1915, the Dashnak organization in Sofia, Bulgaria, proposed to land 20,000 volunteers on the Turkish coast in the Armenian stronghold of Cilicia. That same month, the Boston-based Armenian National Defense Committee of America informed the British foreign secretary that it was making "preparations for the purpose of sending volunteers to Cilicia, where a large section of the Armenian population will unfurl the banner of insurrection against Turkish rule." It was hoped that the British and French governments would supply them with ammunition and artillery.

Turkish fears of an internal revolt were exacerbated the following month by an uprising that took place in the city of Van. Close to the Russian border and in the heartland of historic Armenia, Van had long been a center of nationalist agitation. On April 24, 1915, the Turkish governor reported that 4,000 Armenian fighters had opened fire on the police stations, burned down Muslim houses, and barricaded themselves in the Armenian quarter. About 15,000 refugees from the countryside eventually joined the now-besieged rebels. Less than a month later, the insurgents were saved by the advancing Russian army, forcing the Turkish garrison to retreat. Whether the Van uprising was a rebellion designed and timed to facilitate the advance of the Russians or a defensive action aimed at preventing the already planned deportation of the Armenian community remains one of the points of fierce contention in the historiography of the time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When not tying down Turkish army units, the Dashnaks were of significant help to the Russian army itself (leaving aside the 150,000 Armenian subjects of the czar who served in its ranks). Deeply familiar with the rugged mountains of eastern Anatolia, the Armenian volunteers were invaluable scouts and guides. In one famous episode, the legendary Armenian military leader Andranik Ozanian met with General Mishlayevsky, commander of the czar's forces in the Caucasus, late in the summer of 1914, pointing out the routes through which the Russian army could advance on Turkey.

Thus, as the Turks saw it, the Armenian people the world over had thrown in their lot with the Allied cause and were arrayed against them in a fateful struggle. Having come to consider the Armenians a fifth column, the Ottoman regime decided to take decisive measures to put an end to their treasonable actions. As Morgenthau reported to Washington in July 1915: "[B]ecause Armenian volunteers, many of them Russian subjects, have joined the Russian army in the Caucasus and because some have been implicated in armed revolutionary movements and others have been helpful to Russians in their invasion of the Van district, terrible vengeance is being taken."

In the eyes of the Young Turks, however, the issue was not so much vengeance as national survival in a situation of extreme danger caused by serious military setbacks. The British had taken Basra in Mesopotamia and were moving toward Baghdad. The Allies had launched their assaults on the Dardanelles. Fearing the fall of the capital, the Turks were making preparations to evacuate the sultan and the treasury from Constantinople. Meanwhile, Russian troops were advancing into eastern Anatolia, and Armenian guerrillas were active in the rear of the Turkish army, threatening the very lifelines of the empire. Even if only a limited number of Armenians had actually taken up arms, the authorities in Constantinople understood themselves to be dealing with a population of traitors.

Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the war and at the Paris peace conference in 1919, the Armenians would make no bones about their contribution to the Allied victory. To the contrary: Boghos Nubar, the head of the Armenian delegation, asserted in late October 1918 that his people had in fact been belligerents, fighting alongside the Allies on all fronts; in particular, he wrote to the French foreign minister, 150,000 Armenians had fought in the Russian army and had held the front in the Caucasus after the Russians dropped out of the war in 1917. As Nubar would tell the peace conference on March 8, 1919, the Turks had devastated the Armenians "in retaliation for our unflagging devotion to the cause of the Allies."

By means of such rhetoric Nubar was obviously hoping to win the support of the peace conference for an independent Armenia. But, the essential facts were correct as he stated them: the Armenians had indeed supported the Allies in a variety of ways. Ignoring warnings from many quarters, large numbers of them had fought the Turks, and the government, with its back to the wall, reacted resolutely and viciously. Although none of this can serve to justify what the Turks did to them, it provides indispensable historical context for the human catastrophe that ensued.

There is no denying the dimensions of that catastrophe. The harsher methods employed by the Young Turks included the killing of Armenian notables in Constantinople and the eastern provinces. As for Armenian civilians, perhaps as many as 1 million were turned out of their homes. On a journey through the most inhospitable terrain, they routinely lacked shelter and food and were often subjected to the murderous violence of their government-provided escorts and the Kurdish tribesmen who occupied the route southward to Ottoman-controlled Syria. Massive numbers died along the way.

Can we account for this tragedy without the hypothesis of a genocidal plan on the part of the Young Turks? Most authors supporting the Armenian cause answer in the negative. They cite foreign diplomats on the scene who, in the face of the large number of deaths, concluded that so terrible a loss of life could only be an intended outcome of the deportations. And yet such a conclusion once again ignores the immediate backdrop against which this horrific episode must be seen.

If one of the main causes of the Armenian disaster was starvation, the Armenians were hardly alone in experiencing such deprivation. Severe food shortages were endemic to Turkey at the time. The military mobilization of large numbers of peasants in 1914, as well as the reckless requisitioning of their horses, oxen, and carriages, had made it impossible to bring in the harvest and left many fields untilled for the following year's crop. In the spring of 1915, Ambassador Morgenthau told Washington that the empire's whole domestic situation was "deplorable," with "thousands of the populace . . . daily dying of starvation." In the late

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spring and summer of 1915, the Ottoman provinces of Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria were devastated by a plague of locusts, creating famine conditions. To exacerbate matters, Allied warships had blockaded the coast of Syria and Lebanon, thus preventing the import of food from Egypt.

Moreover, the food that was available in Turkey often could not be distributed. The country's few existing one-track railroads were overburdened, and shortages of coal and wood frequently rendered locomotives unusable. A crucial tunnel on the line toward Syria—the famous Baghdad railway—remained unfinished until late in the war. The resulting scarcities afflicted even the Turkish army, whose troops, as one German officer reported, received a maximum of one third of their allotted rations. In circumstances where soldiers in the Turkish army were dying of undernourishment, it is not so surprising that little if any food was made available to the deported Armenians.

Indeed, the mistreatment of common Turkish soldiers, the subject of many comments by contemporaries, makes an instructive comparison with the wretched lot of the Armenians. Although "provisions and clothing had been confiscated to supply the army," wrote an American missionary in Van, "the soldiers profited very little by this. They were poorly fed and poorly clothed when fed or clothed at all." The Danish missionary Maria Jacobsen noted in her diary on February 7, 1915: "The officers are filling their pockets, while the soldiers die of starvation, lack of hygiene, and illness." Many had neither boots nor socks, and were dressed in rags.

The treatment of Turkish soldiers who were wounded or sick was especially appalling. Those who managed to reach hospitals—many never did—perished in large numbers because of unsanitary conditions and a lack of basic supplies. Patients shared beds or simply lay next to each other on the floor in facilities that often lacked running water and electricity. Typhus, cholera, dysentery, and other infectious diseases spread rapidly. As Maria Jacobsen noted on May 24, 1916, a cholera outbreak in the city of Malatia was killing 100 soldiers a day. "The army there," she wrote, "will soon be wiped out without a war."

The Turks experienced some 244,000 combat deaths during World War I. As against this, some 68,000 soldiers died of their wounds and almost a *half-million* of disease—a ratio of non-combat to combat deaths almost certainly unmatched by any of the other warring nations. This terrible toll obviously does not excuse the treatment of the Armenians, but neither can it be simply ignored in any assessment of the general conditions against which they met their fate. Many of the Turkish deaths could have been prevented by better sanitary conditions and medical care. A government so callous about the suffering of its own soldiers was hardly about to show concern for the terrible human misery that would result from deporting a minority population rightly or wrongly suspected of treason.

ONE OF the problems bedeviling the Armenian side in this controversy is that no authentic documentary evidence exists to prove the culpability of the central government of Turkey for the massacre of 1915-16. In the face of this lack, Armenians have relied upon materials of questionable authenticity like *The Memoirs of Naim Bey* by Aram Andonian. The English edition of this book, first published in 1920, offers in evidence 30 alleged telegrams by Talaat Pasha, Turkey's minister of the interior, some of which order the killing of all Armenians irrespective of sex or age. But the book is considered a forgery not only by Turkish historians but by practically every Western student of Ottoman history.

Similarly unreliable are the verdicts of Turkish military tribunals that in 1919-20 found the top leadership of the Young Turk regime, together with a special-forces outfit called *Teskilat-i Mahsusa*, responsible for the massacres of the Armenians. These trials suffered from serious deficiencies of due process; more importantly, all of the original trial documents are lost, leaving nothing but copies of some documents that were printed in the government gazette and the press.

It is true that no written record of Hitler's order for the Final Solution of the "Jewish question" has been found, either. But the major elements of the decision-making process leading up to the annihilation of the Jews of Europe can be reconstructed from events, court testimony, and a rich store of authentic documents. It is doubtful that the Nuremberg trials would ever have achieved their tremendous significance in authenticating the crimes of the Nazi regime if they had had to rely on a few copies instead of on the thousands of original documents preserved in archives. Barring the unlikely discovery of sensational new documents in the Turkish archives, it is safe to say that no similar evidence exists for the tragic events of 1915-16.

At the same time, a number of facts about the deportations argue against the thesis that they constituted a premeditated program for exterminating the Armenians of Turkey. For one thing, the large

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Armenian communities of Constantinople, Smyrna, and Aleppo were spared deportation and, apart from tribulations that also afflicted the Muslim populations of these cities, survived the war largely intact. This would be analogous to Hitler's failing to include the Jews of Berlin, Cologne, and Munich in the Final Solution.

Moreover, the trek on foot that took so many lives was imposed only on the Armenians of eastern and central Anatolia, a part of the country that had no railroads. Elsewhere, and despite the fact that the one-spur Baghdad line was overburdened with the transport of troops and supplies, Armenian deportees were allowed to purchase rail tickets and were thus spared at least some of the trials of the deportation process. If, as is often alleged, the intent was to subject the exiles to a forced march until they died of exhaustion, why was this punishment not imposed on all?

Similar variation can be found in the fortunes of other parts of the Armenian population. While many of the exiles were left to fend for themselves and often died of starvation, others were given food here and there. Some gendarmes accompanying the convoys sold their charges to Kurds who pillaged and murdered them, but other gendarmes were protective. In some places all Armenians, irrespective of creed, were sent away, while in others Protestant and Catholic (as opposed to Gregorian) Armenians were exempted. Many of the deportees succumbed to the harsh conditions in their places of resettlement, but others were able to survive by making themselves useful as artisans or traders. In some locations, not even conversion to Islam could purchase exemption from deportation; in others, large numbers of Armenians were allowed, or forced, to convert and were saved.

ALL OF these differences, of both treatment and outcome, are difficult to reconcile with a premeditated program of total annihilation. How, then, to explain the events of 1915-16? What accounts for the enormous loss of life?

The documentary evidence suggests that the Ottoman government wanted to arrange an orderly process of deportation—even a relatively humane one, to gauge by the many decrees commanding protection and compassionate treatment of the deportees. But, leaving aside the justice of the expulsion order itself, the deportation and resettlement of the Armenians took place, as we have seen, at a time of great insecurity and dislocation throughout the country and in conditions of widespread suffering and deprivation among Turkish civilians and military personnel. The job of relocating several hundred thousand people in a short span of time and over a highly primitive system of transportation was simply beyond the ability of the Turkish bureaucracy.

Many observers on the scene, indeed, saw the tragedy in this light, constantly citing the incompetence and inefficiency of the Ottoman bureaucracy. "The lack of proper transportation facilities," wrote the American consul in Mersina in September 1915, "is the most important factor in causing the misery." The German consul in Aleppo told his ambassador around the same time that the majority of Armenian exiles were starving to death because the Turks were "incapable of solving the organizational task of mass feeding." A lengthy memorandum on the Armenian question drawn up in 1916 by Alexander von Hoesch, an official in the German embassy, pointed to a basic lack of accountability: some local officials had sought to alleviate the hardships of the exiles, but others were extremely hostile to the Armenians and, in defiance of Constantinople, had abandoned them to the violence of Kurds or Circassians.

Today, the stakes in this historical controversy remain high, and both sides continue to use heavy-handed tactics to advance their views. The Turkish government regularly threatens retaliation against anyone calling into question its own version of events, a threat made good most recently by its cancellation of an order for a $149-million French spy satellite after the French national assembly declared in 2001 that the killing of the Armenians during World War I was a case of genocide. For their part, the Armenians have also played hardball. When Bernard Lewis, in a 1994 letter to *Le Monde*, questioned on scholarly grounds the existence of a plan of extermination on the part of the Ottoman government, a French-Armenian organization brought suit and a French court convicted Lewis of causing "grievous prejudice to truthful memory."

But there are also more hopeful signs, at least on the academic front. In the last several years, a number of conferences have brought together Turkish and Armenian scholars willing to discuss the events of 1915-16 without a political agenda. Turkish historical scholarship has shown signs of a post-nationalist phase, while some scholars on the Armenian side, too, now engage in research free of propagandistic rhetoric. Needless to say, such efforts have brought down accusations of betrayal, even treason, upon the heads of the offending historians; it would be foolish to expect genuine reconciliation any time soon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALL OF which raises deeply troubling questions, not least about the role played by the notion of genocide itself in perpetuating the almost century-old impasse between Turks and Armenians. For, once this charge is on the table, any sort of mutually acceptable resolution becomes extremely difficult if not impossible to achieve. As the Turkish historian Selim Deringil has written, both sides need to "step back from the was-it-genocide-or-not dialogue of the deaf" and instead seek a "common project of knowledge."

If, then, we were to follow this advice, how best should we judge the Armenian tragedy? The primary intent of the deportation order was undoubtedly not to eradicate an entire people but to deny support to the Armenian guerrilla bands and to remove the Armenians from war zones and other strategic locations. For the Ottomans, painful experience with other Christian minorities during the Balkan wars (1912-13) had created extreme sensitivity to rebellion and territorial loss. Talaat Pasha, the minister of the interior, is supposed to have told the cabinet in 1915, "We have to create a Turkish bloc, free of foreign elements, which in the future will never again give the Europeans the opportunity to interfere in the internal affairs of Turkey." Ambassador Morgenthau reported being told on several occasions by Enver Pasha, the Turkish minister of war, that the government had to act forcefully against any community, however small, that was bent upon independence and was acting directly against the interests of the empire.

For the human disaster subsequently endured by its Armenian population, the Ottoman regime certainly bears its due measure of responsibility, just as it does for general corruption, bungling misrule, and indifference to the suffering of its own population during World War I. And one can go further: with the benefit of hindsight, it is also possible to question whether the severity of the threat posed by Armenian revolutionaries justified the drastic remedy of even partial deportation. The Canadian researcher Gwynne Dyer may have put the case most appropriately in writing that, although Turkish allegations of wholesale disloyalty, treason, and revolt on the part of the Ottoman Armenians were "wholly true as far as Armenian sentiment went," they were "only partly true in terms of overt acts, and totally insufficient as a justification for what was done" to the Armenians.

If both Armenians and Turks could accept this appraisal, even as a starting point for further discussion, they would reach an important milestone toward settling one of modern history's most bitter and longstanding conflicts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Forgetting Edmund Wilson

Joseph Epstein

"Mommy, you mean my father is a great critic?"—and he smiled—"I always thought he was just a two-bit book reviewer."

—Mary McCarthy, recalling a post-divorce conversation with her then nine-year-old son Reuel Wilson

"YOU WROTE *Finlandia*, didn't you?," the wife of the Aspen Institute's president asked Edmund Wilson at a dinner in New York at which the Institute awarded him a $30,000 prize. If Wilson were alive today at a similar event, he might be less likely to be confused with the composer Jan Sibelius than with the sociobiologist and entomologist Edward O. Wilson. Twenty years from now, perhaps ten, the question might be, "Edmund who?"

Through the last decades of his life (he died in 1972), the label tediously affixed to Edmund Wilson was "our last great man of letters." Over a long career, he had tried his hand at every literary form—fiction, poetry, drama, intellectual and literary history, travel-anthropology, journal-keeping. But in the end, a critic is what Wilson primarily was, and such reputation as he still enjoys is based on his literary criticism. The body of this criticism is one of the main emphases of the exhaustive new biography of Wilson by Lewis Dabney,* a work decades in preparation and altogether admiring of its subject.

Born in 1895, Wilson lived through what the poet Randall Jarrell, in a famous essay of the 1950's, called the Age of Criticism. But when one thinks of the names of the other critics of the time—Van Wyck Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, F.R. Leavis, Northrop Frye, Yvor Winters, Newton Arvin, Philip Rahv, Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, Alfred Kazin—names first fading from prominence and now beginning to fade from memory, one realizes that literary criticism is not an easy path to immortality.

Does Edmund Wilson's literary criticism figure to endure any longer than that of these others? One thing going for him was that, unlike the critics mentioned above, Wilson never had a permanent academic appointment. He worked at editorial jobs, beginning in the 1920's at *Vanity Fair* and then moving on to the *New Republic*; from the 1940's until the end of his life, he was under contract to the *New Yorker*. Late in life he also inherited money, but not enough to maintain him and the children produced by his four marriages. Chiefly, he lived off his voluminous writing, and this independence was part of his cachet.

Apart from *Memoirs of Hecate County* (1967), a collection of short stories whose commercial success was aided by its having been censored for pornographic content, none of Wilson's books

JOSEPH EPSTEIN *is a veteran contributor to* COMMENTARY. *His new book*, Friendship, an Exposé, *will be published by Houghton Mifflin next July.*

* *Edmund Wilson: A Life in Literature*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 656 pp., $35.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sold particularly well. But the readers who cared for him cared a very great deal. His admirers formed a cult, in which, I ought to delay no longer in saying, I was once a member in good standing. Wilson introduced us to a vast number of important writers—he was something of a walking version of the Modern Library—in prose that seemed virile, informed by a long literary tradition, and wonderfully free of academic jargon. To young men and women with literary aspirations, there was also something more: as early as 1929, Lionel Trilling remarked of Wilson that "he seemed, in his own person, and young as he was, to propose and to realize the idea of the literary life." That was it, exactly.

METROPOLITAN IN his manner, his sweep, the breadth of his interests—he wrote about burlesque and about the Dead Sea Scrolls—Wilson was the contemporary and friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos. He had been the first critic to spot and praise the writing of Ernest Hemingway, who once told him that his opinion was the only one "in the States that I have any respect for." All this conduced to make Wilson himself seem a key figure of the 1920's, the last unequivocally rich, even glamorous, period in our national literature. Nor did it hurt that Wilson had family connections going back in American history to the 17th century, giving him something like patrician standing in a field increasingly occupied by Jewish sons of immigrants eager to find jobs in formerly anti-Semitic university English departments.

A major part of Wilson's *modus operandi* was his sheer authoritativeness. Since in literature no one can finally prove anything, except perhaps the technical defects of prosody in a poem, criticism lives or dies by the persuasiveness of the critic, a persuasiveness based largely on his confidence and the strength of his assertions. No one was more aware of this than Wilson, who put the case perhaps as well (and as baldly) as it can be put:

> The implied position of the people who know about literature (as is also the case in every other art) is simply that they know what they know, and that they are determined to impose their opinions by main force of eloquence or assertion on the people who do not know.

Adding to this authoritativeness was that Wilson, who from late adolescence seemed to have the gift of perpetual middle age, became, when middle-aged, precociously old. Crankiness, of opinion and of manner, became part of his armament. By the 1950's he had bowed out of contemporary literary life, ceasing to comment on current work: "If I now play at being old," he wrote in *The Sixties*, one of the collected volumes of his journals, "I never played at being young." From then on he responded to requests from editors and readers with a postcard listing all the things he refused to do, and the list was impressive in its inclusiveness.

Until the 1950's, though, Wilson was very much a man of his time. In the 1920's he was a powerful advocate of literary modernism (a term he grew to dislike), and in his book *Axel's Castle: A Study of the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (1935), he explained to the uninitiated the meaning and mechanics of the work of James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and other avant-garde writers. In the 1930's, he became politicized, reporting on union strikes and on unemployment and poverty in America. This writing was later collected in *The American Earthquake* (1951).

Anti-Americanism had long since become a strong strain in Wilson's intellectual makeup; the country was always letting him down. His politics had begun in pacifism, brought on by a stint as an ambulance driver in World War I, where he witnessed at close quarters the chewed-up bodies of the war's wounded and dead. High on the camaraderie he felt with his fellow enlisted men, he then also declared himself a socialist. By the 30's, with the Depression, he added the anti-capitalist component, and in 1932, along with a large number of other intellectuals, he voted for William Z. Foster, the Communist candidate for President.

Exuberant about the prospects of socialism, Wilson wrote a long book about it, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (1940). The story told in this book culminates in the arrival in Petrograd of its hero, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, to take control of the Russian Revolution. Wilson could never quite bring himself to say flat out that Lenin was no hero but one of the great barbarians of history and that it would have been much better for the Russian people had his train never arrived.

By the 50's, a broad touch of snobbery, of the I'm-well-out-of-it variety, was brought on board; in a book called *A Piece of My Mind* (1956), Wilson remarked that he did not recognize the country depicted in the pages of *Life* magazine. All of this came together in *The Cold War and the Income Tax: A Protest* (1963). Wilson, who owed taxes for several years running, purported to be outraged at the realization that some of his (as yet unpaid) tax money would go for weapons that might be used in war.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THOSE UNPAID taxes were emblematic of another facet of Edmund Wilson's life. One of the unintended consequences of Lewis Dabney's biography, which fully endorses Wilson's politics and general point of view, is to establish the grave disorder of that life in its every phase and aspect.

It is no secret that Wilson was what is euphemistically called a functioning alcoholic; the euphemism lies in the suggestion that one can drink a lot and still function. Function, true enough, Wilson did, at least as a writer: his literary production never slackened. I used to think of him awakening in the morning after a hard night's boozing, shaking himself like a dog coming in out of the rain, then repairing to his desk to take notes and write out a summary of some dreary southern Civil War diary for another of his thick literary-historical books. But Wilson's drinking also left his life in almost perpetual disarray and, until his final marriage, bohemian squalor.

Much is made by Dabney, as by commentators before him, of Wilson's following in the tradition of his father. Edmund Wilson, Sr. had been the Republican attorney general of New Jersey, from which office he prosecuted important corruption cases with such success that President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, offered him various jobs in his administration, none of which he accepted. A man of great probity, the elder Wilson believed that investing in the stock market was a species of gambling, and therefore steered clear of it; he gave popular lectures with a note of moral uplift; he provided for the family of his ill younger brother.

Edmund Wilson, Sr. also suffered from hypochondria, to the point of undergoing what Dabney describes as lengthy "eclipses." This tightly strung, neurotic element is something that Dabney speculates may have been inherited by his son. Little else was. Upon his death, the elder Wilson put his wife in charge of his estate, under the assumption that his son was incapable of managing his own finances. This was not a foolish assumption: Edmund Wilson was the sort of person who could get into a cab in Manhattan and tell the driver to take him to Cape Cod.

Ineptitude in the details of life is a motif playing throughout Dabney's lengthy biography. Not only was Wilson incapable of driving a car, he could not type, could not handle money, and had no sense of practical politics. He also had no notion of how to be affectionate with his own children. With women, his method of seduction was often the fatal one of proposing marriage. Sexually, he was ardent; physically, repellent. "If you were just prose," a woman named Elizabeth Waugh wrote to him, "I'd be mad about you."

But he wasn't just prose, and he certainly wasn't poetry. He was instead a bald, pudgy little man with a drinking problem and a mean streak.

WILSON AT his meanest shows up in Dabney's account of his marriage to the novelist and critic Mary McCarthy—a marriage made in 1937 when he was forty-two and she was twenty-five. "I was too young," McCarthy would later claim, and "I was too old," Wilson would counter. It would be closer to the truth to say that both were too selfish and wanting in the least human insight. McCarthy always mistook her snobbery for morality; Wilson mistook life for literature. Dabney, summing up this wretched partnership, writes: "American letters has not seen another alliance so flawed and so distinguished." So flawed and so distinguished—what a way to characterize the union of a true bitch and a genuine bully.

The Wilson-McCarthy marriage does supply Dabney with the most interesting chapter of his book. As recorded in Dabney's deadpan prose, this nightmare had everything: abortion, cuckoldry, beatings, the exchange of insults meant to maim, desertion, unhelpful psychotherapeutic counseling, and lots of drunken rage and hysteria to go around. My favorite moment occurs during the testimony, in court, of Nathalie Rahv, the wife of Philip Rahv, the co-editor of *Partisan Review* and formerly Mary McCarthy's lover before she left him for Wilson. According to Mrs. Rahv, Wilson humiliated McCarthy by accusing her of poor housekeeping in front of friends. Mary McCarthy a poor homemaker—shocking!

After the break-up of Wilson's marriage to McCarthy in 1945, Dabney's biography begins to lose its interest. Much of Wilson's literary criticism entailed the elaborate summary of the works he was commenting on, so Dabney is left with the dreary task of summarizing summaries, interspersed with the recital of trips on and off the wagon. Dabney neglects to mention that Wilson's books and journals can be longueur-laden well beyond the legal limit; one of his specialties in his journals was great boring descriptions of landscape. In his later life Wilson spent a good deal of time in the half-ruined old house in upstate New York that he had inherited and that his last wife hated. There he drank and scribbled away, living a role resembling nothing so much as a character out of Tennessee Williams, but in a northern setting and with a Calvinist work ethic added.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wilson, Dabney reports, "was the only well-known literary alcoholic of his generation whose work was not compromised by his drinking." That begs the question of why he drank so much. Among the reasons one can think of is that he did not really set out to be a literary critic. He wanted instead to be a literary artist: as Dabney puts it, "a writer of poetry, drama, or fiction who also writes criticism, or someone whose literary criticism feeds a larger historical project." It took him a long time—and the production of a fair amount of drab fiction—to admit that such strengths as he possessed lay in writing not about life directly but about literary and historical figures.

Lionel Trilling, the only American critic who rivaled Wilson for renown during their lifetimes, was also less than content in his career. Trilling was a larger, more philosophical, more finely meshed thinker than Wilson, yet, as published portions of his diaries make plain, he wished he had had the courage to devote himself to fiction instead of settling for a life of teaching and criticism.

The sad fact is that, for a capacious and lively mind, literary criticism, the job of regularly registering opinions of other persons' work, is for the most part an insufficient activity. "You know Plato's contempt for the image of an image," George Santayana replied to a correspondent who once suggested that he give up metaphysics to devote himself to literary criticism:

> [B]ut as a man's view of things is an image in the first place, and his work is an image of that, and the critic's feelings are an image of that work, and his writings an image of his feelings, and your idea of what the critic means only an image of his writings, please consider that you are steeping your poor original tea leaves in their fifth wash of hot water, and are drinking slops.

Thanks all the same, Santayana summed up, but he would stick to philosophy.

In the history of literary criticism written in English, very few names have survived, or probably deserve to survive. Samuel Johnson is one, perhaps the only true genius who put his mind chiefly to criticism; and Johnson also happens to have been a great man, which gives his writing all the more authority. Matthew Arnold is another, not so much for his particular pronouncements, which could be very smart and sharp, as for their cultural sweep and continuing relevance.

Some might include William Hazlitt in this company, though he was a better writer than critic, and what he thought of the actors, poets, and painters of his day is less important than that he understood the spirit of his age and wrote brilliantly and courageously about it. Others might claim a place for T.S. Eliot, but much of Eliot's best criticism is rather narrowly confined to adjusting the canon of English poetry—Metaphysical poets up, John Milton down—and to the principles behind literary creation.

DOES EDMUND WILSON belong in this short list of critics of enduring interest? I certainly thought so once—and I was hardly alone. To his many admirers, Wilson—courageous in his opinions, deep in his culture, broad in his point of view, unassailable in his integrity—seemed to exist in the closest possible relationship with literature itself. Versatile, productive, cosmopolitan, he was a being organized for writing. To judge by the reverential reviews of Dabney's biography, this is still the received opinion.

In *Axel's Castle*, Wilson observed that W.B. Yeats, whose poetry in this respect he likened to Dante's, could "sustain a grand manner through sheer intensity without rhetorical heightening." Citing this remark, Dabney tells us that the writer Clive James has singled it out as an example of "permanent criticism." How permanent it is cannot be known; but it does strike the characteristic Wilson note.

As a critic, Edmund Wilson was at his best explaining *how* literature worked; what seemed to interest him most was the mechanics of creation. He was able to demonstrate why the modernist writers were important by showing precisely how they went about doing things not hitherto done. He was less good, I think, at what Henri Bergson defined as the center of the critic's task— namely, "developing in thought what artists wanted to suggest emotionally."

As a young critic, Wilson fancied himself a director of traffic in literary reputations. T.S. Matthews, who worked as Wilson's assistant on the cultural pages of the *New Republic*, recalled in his autobiography how Wilson "aimed" him, giving marching orders on which authors to praise and which to deflate. The poet E.E. Cummings neatly captured this generalissimo aspect of Wilson when he called him "the man in the iron necktie."

As a literary cop, however, Wilson did not always get his man. He failed to recognize the importance of Robert Frost and of Wallace Stevens, the two most lasting poets writing during his lifetime. Although on to Hemingway from the start, he underrated Willa Cather, and allowed himself to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be so put off by Theodore Dreiser's clumsy style as to miss his power. Later he much overrated James Baldwin, probably for political reasons. Aloof patrician though Wilson wished to seem, he was also a *bien-pensant*, and broadcast no opinions likely to give offense in the academic and editorial quarters of the literary establishment that had come to dominate culture in the United States during the last decades of his life.

Saddest of all, Wilson could not quite bring himself to get full-out behind his friend and Princeton classmate F. Scott Fitzgerald. (T.S. Eliot, in a letter to Fitzgerald, called *The Great Gatsby* the first major step forward for the American novel since Henry James.) After Fitzgerald's death, Wilson edited his notebooks, published under the title of *The Crack-up* (1945), and completed (not very successfully) Fitzgerald's unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon* (1960). Yet, as Dabney writes, Wilson "would never be free of the need to measure himself against his wonderfully talented friend"—and, as Dabney might have added, to come up short. Wilson must have found it galling that Fitzgerald, an Irish *arriviste* with pathetic social aspirations who could not spell and barely made it through Princeton, had magical gifts—of storytelling, of phrasing, of human understanding—that he himself would never come close to attaining.

Wilson's stately, confidently cadenced prose is another of the items that come up for commendation in the standard praise for his work. And yet it is difficult to think of memorable phrases, or powerful formulations, in Wilson's criticism. (An exception is his remarking that "the cruelest thing that has happened to Lincoln since he was shot by Booth has been to fall into the hands of Carl Sandburg.") He was a man, as I have indicated, for the long summary, heavily burdened with the extensive quotation. He was perhaps at his best at literary portraiture. The flashiest single piece of criticism he wrote is his interpretation of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, a novella about household ghosts corrupting young children. In Wilson's reading of this tale, every word of which shimmers with James's deliberate ambiguity, the solution to the problem of whether the ghosts really exist lies in realizing that the story itself is the delusory neurotic invention of the governess who tells it.

This interpretation, whatever its persuasiveness, happens to be in some ways characteristic not only of Wilson's critical method but of his intellectual spirit. In re-reading him, one realizes how unoriginal he could be: a Marxist in a time of Marxists, a Freudian in a time of Freudians, he did not strike out much on his own. Another of his famous essays, "Philoctetes, the Wound and the Bow," holds that artistic creation is bound up with psychic wounds. In a collection of essays entitled *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (1947), Wilson accordingly marched Dickens, Kipling, A.E. Housman, John Jay Chapman, and Hemingway through the same gauntlet, showing that all of them labored under the burden of serious wounds acquired in childhood, the sublimation of which resulted in significant art.

If such heavy psychologizing seems less compelling today than it did 50 or so years ago, that may be partly owing to the fact that, as Proust wrote, "each generation of critics takes the opposite of the truth accepted by their predecessors." But partly, too, it is because Freudianism itself is no longer so compelling as an explanation of human behavior, let alone of artistic creation.

Wilson was impressed by the two idea systems of Freudianism and Marxism, my own view is, because he was insufficiently impressed by life's mysteries; as a professional explainer, he preferred problems that had solutions, questions for which there were answers, and in Freudianism and Marxism he found no shortage of both. I suspect his difficulty with Joseph Conrad and Franz Kafka, two major writers whose power he could never quite comprehend, stemmed from the fact that each took as his subject, precisely, the complex mystery of life: Conrad on the cosmic level, asking why we are put on earth; Kafka on the level of human nature, asking why we are as sadly and comically limited as we are.

ONE SEES this weakness most glaringly in Wilson's essay on Abraham Lincoln in *Patriotic Gore* (1962), his collection of studies of American Civil War figures. What troubles Wilson most is Lincoln's belief in God. That Lincoln felt there was a design in the universe (he referred to God as "the Almighty Architect"), that he called on God's help in attempting to keep the Union together, is interpreted by Wilson as either self-delusion or political convenience, or both. He concludes his thoughts on Lincoln's assassination by suggesting that "it was morally and dramatically inevitable that this prophet who had crushed opposition and sent thousands of men to their deaths should finally attest his good faith by laying down his own life with theirs."

This poor attempt at irony is further evidence that Edmund Wilson had decided morality was beside the point in political life generally and in deal-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ings among nations specifically. In his preface to *Patriotic Gore*, he concluded that an appropriate metaphor for the behavior of nations was that of sea slugs, each trying to engorge itself on the next. This instinctive animalist behavior, he claimed, is what also characterized our dealings with the Soviet Union, and it "prevents us from recognizing today, in our relation to our cold-war opponent, that our panicky pugnacity as we challenge him is not virtue but at bottom the irrational instinct of an active power organism in the presence of another such organism." The Civil War, the cold war, probably World War II, and every other conflict among men were merely thin disguises behind which lay more or less hidden imperialist appetites—especially American ones.

In his own final summation, Dabney suggests that, like Samuel Johnson, Wilson may one day be viewed as the central figure of his time. "In the meantime," Dabney concludes, "he and his writing, in a word that he took over from Emerson, are fortifying." Samuel Johnson was indeed central to the second half of the 18th century, but Edmund Wilson hadn't anything approaching Johnson's gravity, his conviction, his scholarship, his subtle insight into everyday life, or his irradiating moral force. As for whether Wilson's writings are fortifying, just whom they fortify is less than clear. On re-reading, I find they no longer fortify me.

One of the advantages artists have over critics is that they can be nearly complete damn fools and still produce interesting and important, even lasting, art. Critics are not permitted such large margins of stupidity. It matters that they get things right; their opinions, which is all they chiefly have, are crucial. Wisdom, in a critic, is never excess baggage. Edmund Wilson, it begins to be clear, always traveled light.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sutzkever's Ascent—A Memoir

David G. Roskies

In late May 1967, my mother picked up the phone in our home in Montreal to call the Yiddish poet Abraham Sutzkever in Tel Aviv. From the screaming headlines in the three Yiddish dailies to which we subscribed, she knew that UN Secretary General U Thant had capitulated to the demand of Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to pull the UN Emergency Force out of Sinai. The Egyptians and Syrians were now massing their troops for war on the borders with Israel, which for all intents and purposes had been abandoned to its fate by the rest of the world. Mother offered to wire funds so that Sutzkever, his wife Freydke, and their daughter Mirele could fly to Canada for safety.

What Sutzkever said to her in reply I never learned. They had not been personally acquainted for very long—when my parents left Vilna in 1930, Sutzkever, born in 1913 and today still living in Tel Aviv, was an adolescent, and their paths had never crossed. But my mother's Montreal salon was a fixture of the Yiddish-speaking world, as well known as were her financial benefactions to Yiddish poets and artists, and in the late 1950's they had at last met. My guess is that he now laughed at her offer to help him leave Israel.

By this time, in any case, I was in Boston, in my sophomore year at Brandeis, and I was a confirmed "exilic" Jew, a disciple of George Steiner and theoretically loyal to no land, beholden to no place; or at least no living place. For me, at the cosmopolitan age of nineteen, no one could carry the mantle of Jewish moral authority, teach the authentic traditions, or speak for the sacred dead unless born and trained in the vanished Old World—a theologian like A.J. Heschel or Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, a writer like Elie Wiesel or I.B. Singer, a scholar like Brandeis's Nahum Glatzer. Or, by way of radical contrast, Herbert Marcuse, another European teaching at Brandeis and then at the height of his influence as the philosophical guru of the tear-down-the-walls young.

Along with millions of my generation, I had joined in singing hymns of protest led by one of our own, Bob Dylan (né Zimmerman). When it came to seducing girls, however, I would resort to the Yiddish I learned at my mother's knee. My most effective song by far was "Beneath the Whiteness of Your Stars," written by Sutzkever and set to music in the Vilna ghetto during World War II. "Beneath the whiteness of your stars," I sang, "Stretch out toward me your white hand;/All my words are turned to tears—/They long to rest within your hand." From Mother's stories, I knew that Yiddish songs invariably worked magic, though what happened next she never taught me.

But in May 1967, aspiring cosmopolitan or no, it was for the Jewish state that I felt most deeply. I was thus doubly disappointed by my parents' re-

David G. Roskies *teaches literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary.* *This is adapted from a work in progress,* The Last Yiddish Novel: A Memoir. *Copyright © 2005 by David G. Roskies.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sponse when, in the first week of June, with war in the Middle East a certainty, I asked their permission to volunteer for the Israeli home front. I lacked all practical knowledge, they counseled. Furthermore, should the war end in Israel's favor, I was already scheduled to leave in two months' time to spend my junior year abroad in Jerusalem. They were right; I stayed put. Indeed, by the time I arrived in Israel in late summer, as part of the largest group of students—some 300 strong—that the American Friends of the Hebrew University had ever flown over, a real army of Israeli kids exactly my age had routed the Arab foe and liberated the Old City of Jerusalem.

Besides taking university courses in Yiddish literature, I planned to tour the Yiddish landscape of Israel. I soon found everyone who was still alive. In the Tel Aviv phonebook alone, there were more Yiddish novelists, poets, essayists, journalists, actors, directors, thinkers, scholars, and communal leaders than I could possibly hope to meet in my ten months in the land. With telephone tokens in hand, I called up the whole Yiddish world, using the identical words of introduction: "*Kh'heys Dovid Roskes. A studént fun Kanáde. Kh'volt zeyer veln zikh bakenen mit aykh.*" (My name is David Roskies. I'm a student from Canada. I'd so much like to meet you.)

At the top of my list were the living legends from Vilna who had known my parents during their student years. I started with Izye Rosenshein and then moved on to Dr. Alexander Libo, the dashing captain of Vilna's Maccabi rowing team who had hidden out in an underground bunker and was the only one of my parents' inner circle to have survived the war—and who was still, in his late seventies, practicing medicine in Tel Aviv. The patients I saw in his waiting room were as old as he, and spoke every European language but Hebrew. Over a glass of Israeli grapefruit juice, a drink I was hooked on, I had already been told by Izye Rosenshein that on the day in 1944 when the Red Army liberated Vilna, what was on Mrs. Libo's mind was whether her dress would still be considered stylish by the women above ground.

I had invested more, however, in meeting Mark Dvorzhetski, another famous physician from Vilna now living on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Square. A heavy-set man with enormous black eyebrows, completely bald, he greeted me at the door of what looked to be a fancy apartment. Younger than Dr. Libo by about two decades, he spoke the same Vilna Yiddish as the Palevskys of New York and Tevke (Ted) Sheres of Montreal—former partisans, all—with a crisp, spicy diction.

I had brought him a copy of my play, *Hineni*, which we had performed at Brandeis, both the English original and a Yiddish translation. In this drama about the failed 1943 uprising in the Vilna ghetto, the narrator's lines, I told Dr. Dvorzhetski, were taken verbatim from "Apologia of a Physician," an essay he had written in Paris soon after the end of the war. "Thoughts are disquieting and memories astir," he read, knitting his huge eyebrows. "Like my grandfathers before me, I rise at midnight to weep for the destruction of the Temple. It is the ancient ceremony of nocturnal reveries in a new form and with a new content." He was curious to know how I had portrayed Jacob Gens, the head of the *Judenrat*, and did I know that Zelig Kalmanovitsh's son, Shalom Luria, was living on a kibbutz? He asked nothing about me or about how a young, Canadian-born Jew had come to speak fluent Yiddish. I had sought him out to commune with his sorrow, and that was enough.

MY SECRET goal while in Israel was to publish the tenth issue of our Yiddish student journal, *Yugntruf* ("Call to Youth"), by drawing solely on local talent. For sharing such literary ambitions, there was only one address that mattered in the upscale northern part of Tel Aviv.

Rising slowly to the top floor, in an elevator car just big enough for three passengers, I pictured myself as a young provincial writer, Hebrew manuscript in hand, having made my way to Warsaw to appear at the doorstep of the great I.L. Peretz (ca. 1852-1915). Greeting me in a satin waistcoat, smoking a pipe or cigar, Peretz would determine whether my forte was lyric poetry or realistic sketches, and explain to me why it was necessary that I switch from Hebrew, read merely by thousands, to Yiddish, spoken by millions.

The voice I had heard on the intercom below could only have been Freydke's. This was the "F. Levitan" to whom the young Abraham Sutzkever had dedicated his poem, "On My Wander Flute," when they first fell in love. "What is left to do in such an hour," he had written, "O, my world of a thousand colors,/except/to gather into the knapsack of the wind/the red beauty/and bring it home for evening bread." Never was a poet's wife more aptly named—Freydke, meaning joy. God, how youthful she still looked with her jet-black hair!

The inside of the apartment was cool and calm, even in the midday heat, with Chagalls and other priceless paintings on every wall. Some were portraits of Sutzkever himself at various stations of his life: here with dark-rimmed glasses, there with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shock of brown hair atop a bohemian-blue turtleneck sweater. The coffee table was cluttered with books in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, Polish, French, and German. Sutzkever's desk faced us as we sat on the couch, offset by a wall of books and files crammed with manuscripts and literary correspondence. This was the desk, I imagined, where he had put the finishing touches on his great epic poem, *Geheymshtot*, "Secret City," about the last ten Jews living in the sewers beneath Vilna.

Sutzkever was dressed in a plaid short-sleeved shirt, open at the collar. His hair had thinned since I had seen him last at an unforgettable Hanukkah gathering in Montreal in 1963. His forehead was now like adamant, harder than flint.

Why had I walked all the way in such heat?

"*Vayl ver es kumt tsu aykh iz oyle-regl*," I wanted to say: because coming here signifies an ascent. Instead I replied, referring to him in the honorific third person, "Does he not live on the top floor? If not higher?" Returning at that moment with a tall glass of grapefruit juice, Freydke laughed with pleasure at my allusion to Peretz's famous story about a saintly hasidic rabbi.

"Ach," she said, "here, we live in an elevator building, but how sorely Abrasha misses his mailman!" When they had lived in a third-floor apartment elsewhere in Tel Aviv, said Sutzkever, taking her cue, the mailman would yell up to him from the street, in Yiddish: "Sutzkever! Leivick just sent you a manuscript!" "Sutzkever! Here's a large envelope from Opatoshu!"

It was my turn to laugh. I laughed at the invasion of a writer's privacy. I laughed at the chutzpah of a simple Jew hawking the great names of Yiddish literature for all the world to hear. I laughed at the subversiveness of an Israeli mailman yelling in Yiddish in the Hebrew city of Tel Aviv. In fact, Yiddish writers routinely used to provide their readers with their home address. But now that Jewish Warsaw was no more, now that Peretz no longer lived at Jerozolimskie 83 and Hillel Zeitlin no longer held forth at Szliska 60, Sutzkever's apartment in Tel Aviv was the one place where every Yiddish manuscript could still find a home. Someday, too—God willing—a manuscript of mine.

Like the mailman, you never came to Sutzkever empty-handed. You had to bring news of the world, preferably news about the Yiddish world. But any Jewish or literary news would do as well. So I reported to Sutzkever about Professor Khone Shmeruk, his relative by marriage with whom I was studying in Jerusalem, and about what I was hearing from home. Yes, it was true that Mother and the poet Melekh Ravitch had had a falling-out. How did I know it was for real this time? Because she ordered the bronze bust of Ravitch removed from our living room and brought down to the basement. Had I attended the funeral in New York of Uriel Weinreich (1926-1967), whose brilliant career as a scholar of Yiddish had been cut short by leukemia? No, I had not. Nor had I even met this man, who was to have trained me in the field.

Surrounded by all the books and works of art, protected from the midday heat and the unbearable humidity, seated on the couch with Sutzkever to my left and Freydke to my right, I knew that to begin talking shop, to discuss the feasibility of publishing our student magazine in Israel, would be tantamount to sacrilege. The purpose of this exchange was to create a mood, to start things rolling, to set the stage for memories while, lurking just beneath the surface of our words, hiding just beyond our circle of intimacy, were the forces of evil that only yesterday had destroyed Vilna, destroyed Yiddish, destroyed our people. Our mundane anecdotes—like Sutzkever's poetry—were holding the demons at bay.

VILNA, 1928. It was raining cats and dogs, and fifteen-year-old Abrasha Sutzkever was impossibly broke. What to do? The latest movie was playing at the Piccadilly across the street, and he was determined not to leave the spot until he had found money for a ticket. So he looked around and looked around, and there, swimming in the gutter, lay a whole zloty. With the change he bought himself an ice cream.

Vilna, 1943. Sutzkever and 39 other captive Jews were working in the building of the Yiddish Scientific Institute—YIVO—outside the ghetto as part of the Paper Brigade, charged with locating cultural treasures for the Germans to loot. He and Rokhl Krinsky were working as a team when he suddenly turned to her and said, "Rokhl, go over to that shelf and pull out the seventh volume of the *shas*"—the Talmud—"and I promise that you'll find American dollars hidden inside." Rokhl, a woman long under Sutzkever's spell, knew better than to ask questions. She went over to the shelf, pulled out the seventh volume—*Gittin* ("Divorce"), I think it was—flipped through the huge folio pages, and found . . . $125 in cash.

I neglected to ask what they did with the money, whether they used it to buy food or arms. Did it matter? In other stories, told against the backdrop of the ghetto, or of the partisan brigades, or of Moscow at the height of the postwar Stalinist ter-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ror, the figure of Sutzkever once again prevailed over certain death by his ability to read the hieroglyphics of history. In the shadow of the Kremlin, he had said to his wife: "Freydke, you'll see. Some day there won't be enough wagons in Moscow to cart all these statues of the Little Father [Stalin] into the dump." Freydke, with a big smile, nodded.

After the war, Sutzkever labored mightily to rescue the *sheymes*, the sacred fragments written by the dead. Back in Vilna, a young man named Avreml Golub ran up to him and whispered in his ear, "*Gebn tsi nit gebn?*" (That is, do I relinquish the archive of the Kovno ghetto to the NKVD, or not?) "*Nit gebn!*" proclaimed the oracle.

As I did not come to that first visit empty-handed, I did not leave empty-handed. In addition to the latest issue of *Di goldene keyt* ("The Golden Chain"), the Yiddish literary journal that Sutzkever had been editing since 1949, he presented me with the latest, exquisitely published volume of his verse, inscribed with a doodled self-portrait suitable for framing. Could this be in return for Mother's financial largesse? Why *did* she—and not she alone—support him so lavishly? Was not the glory of a poet to be measured by the poetry alone? Ach, I had much to learn.

SIX WEEKS later, on a mild September afternoon, Sutzkever had business to attend to downtown at the Peretz publishing house on Allenby Street, and I was happy to tag along. What better opportunity to ask him whether he knew of anyone who could typeset our student journal, with all the requisite diacritical marks? To use his own typesetter, he explained as we boarded the bus, was out of the question; the press that published him was a cooperative, affiliated with Israel's labor federation, the Histadrut. Suddenly I heard the driver calling us to the front. Sutzkever had let me board ahead of him as—so I thought—an act of *noblesse oblige*. Actually, he had meant for me to pay his fare. Making light of my embarrassment, he promptly deposited the coins.

After all those years hobnobbing with writers and artists in my parents' home, I felt horribly inept. Far worse, I had failed the test of religious imagination, I who fancied myself exquisitely alive to manifestations of the sacred in the realm of the everyday. Sutzkever was no mere poet or raconteur. His poetry was scripture, his home a sanctuary, his person a priestly oracle. Pilgrims bring offerings, however modest, to a shrine. Was I any different?

But the afternoon was not yet over. His meeting was with the director of the publishing house, Shloyme Shvaytser, and Sutzkever's rage at this poor man, occasioned by two misprints in the latest book that had appeared under their joint imprimatur, was terrifying to behold. God help me if I were ever to be on the receiving end. But then, as if to make amends, both for the scene I had just witnessed and for my shameful performance on the bus, Sutzkever insisted that I come home with him for a light supper.

We ate in the living room, seated on the couch, and after drinking a *l'khayim*, he and Freydke proceeded to tell me the story I most wanted to hear.

It was the story of their miraculous 1944 airlift to freedom on the strength of his epic wartime poem, "Kol Nidrei." The manuscript had been carried on foot all the way to Moscow by a partisan named Yurgis. After it was read aloud at a public gathering organized by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, the committee's two chairmen, the writer Peretz Markish and the actor-director Shlomo Mikhoels, arranged through Justas Paleckis, the prime minister in exile of Soviet Lithuania, for a Red Army plane to be sent into the forests to rescue the great partisan-poet. By the skin of their teeth, Abrasha and Freydke made it to the landing strip on a frozen lake. In the cockpit of the tiny two-propeller machine, there was room for only the pilot and the Yiddish poet; with Freydke strapped down in the fuselage, they made their narrow escape. Speaking of bodies—Freydke interrupted Sutzkever's recitation— I should know that the male partisans in the Narocz forest were utterly indifferent to the filth and lice, but every other day, in lieu of bathing, she would roll naked in the snow.

With his austere forehead and sorrowful eyes, I thought this is how the prophet Ezekiel must have appeared to the exiles in Babylonia: Ezekiel who, if this was what it took to save the word of God, would swallow a scroll inscribed with lamentations, dirges, and woes; Ezekiel who, for the benefit of a remaining few believers, would rehearse and rehearse his transfiguring visions of punishment and salvation. How blessed I was to be numbered among them—and to have gained the confidence of Mrs. Ezekiel, too.

As Sutzkever ushered me out, I noticed hidden among the oil paintings a small tin plaque covered with rust. It read "Wilkomirski 14."

"Oh," I said, "that was your address in Shnípeshik, where you lived with your mother in an attic. There, just as you were laboring over your first poem for Hanukkah, she presented you with a fountain pen in its box of gopher wood."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You know about that?" asked Sutzkever with evident delight.

"I heard you read a poem about it—in Montreal."

"Yes," he said after but a moment's pause. "That was a splendid evening."

SITTING ON the crosstown bus on my way back to the Tel Aviv bus terminal, I relived the evening in my mind, and suddenly everything snapped into place.

In 1963 Sutzkever had been on an extended lecture tour in the United States and Canada, with several appearances in my hometown. One was a black-tie affair at the Ritz Carlton sponsored by the Histadrut, from which I had been spared. Now it was the first night of Hanukkah, and the Vilna compatriots had invited the Sutzkevers to an intimate gathering at Montreal's Jewish Public Library. My parents were out of town, and for some reason my sister, Ruth Wisse, who had arranged his first visit to Montreal a few years earlier, was also unable to attend.* So I represented the family.

Except for the fact that the tea and cake were served before the program instead of afterward—which enabled me to approach Sutzkever, hand him a copy of my first Yiddish story, "The International," and tell him about my literary plans—the evening proceeded as always. The usual suspects got up to speak: Mr. Grossman, high-pitched like a schoolmarm, and our elder statesman Melekh Ravitch, who praised the honored guest for having assumed moral responsibility for all of Yiddish literature. And then it was the turn of Mr. Rywusz.

Rywusz was no public speaker. In a heavy Russian accent, he began to reminisce about the ghetto, the round-ups, the killing field of Ponary where 35,000 were murdered, the Night of the Yellow Passes, the work brigades, the capture of Yitzhak Wittenberg, commander of the ghetto's fighting forces, the failed uprising, the flight to the forest, the encirclement, the betrayals, the miraculous airlift of Abrasha and Freydke. When he finished, Freydke got up. She was supposed to thank the assembled guests; only she couldn't, because she started to cry. Whereupon a Mr. Mandelbaum jumped up from the audience and insisted on saying a few words, insisted on reliving a Hanukkah celebration in the forest twenty years earlier with Abrasha, Freydke, and Shmerke Kaczerginski, recalling exactly how they lit the candles—in memory of the ancient miracle in the Temple, or to honor the already murdered millions?—and what words were spoken, and how later, when they smelled the German bodies burning on all the highways, it was the smell of vengeance, the vengeance they had sworn to take when they formed the brigade named *Nekome*, revenge. Then he too burst out crying, and his wife had to lead him out of the auditorium.

Sutzkever had the last word. Speaking as if in a trance, he went around the room, calling out the names of his old Vilna friends: Czuzhoj, the buddy he had gone swimming with on the far side of the Vilíye river; Tevke Sheres, "with a gaze so steadfast and purposeful that it could make the enemy wither away." Sutzkever looked younger than I would ever see him again. He had been summoned back, to a time before the slaughter, and now, heeding the summons, he proceeded to celebrate yet another first night of Hanukkah.

It was 1928, he said, and he was fifteen (my age exactly), and his mother, wearing a rose-colored kerchief, walked into the freezing attic where they lived at Wilkomirski 14 in the Vilna suburb of Shnípeshik and found him writing a poem. The poem he would read to us now had been written in memory of that "first poem."

As the bus turned left on Ibn Gabirol Street toward the terminal, I remembered how very disappointed I had been with Sutzkever that night for choosing to read this poem about his childhood, with its invocation of the gift of the pen in its gopher-wood box.

"What did you expect?," asked my friend Khaskl, an aspiring Yiddish poet himself, when I complained to him the next day. "That he would trot out 'The Teacher Mira' that we memorized as schoolchildren?" Gopher wood, Khaskl reminded me, was the wood that arks are built of, to survive the mounting floodwaters.

"He should have read one of the poems that he wrote while fighting with the partisans," I protested, "with the purple juice of berries instead of ink."

But Khaskl, I now understood, had been right. What rescued Sutzkever from death was not the military airlift but the muse—the muse who paid him visit after visit after visit, whether in the luminescent frost of a Vilna suburb or in the enervating heat of Tel Aviv. And to ensure that this heavenly letter-carrier not get lost along the way, Sutzkever, perhaps on the day the Jews of Vilna were rounded up and marched into the ghetto, or perhaps afterward when there remained of them nothing but their ashes, had managed to salvage the tin plaque bearing his Shnípeshik address, so that decades later the muse might be led to meet her anointed poet in fiery embrace on the uppermost floor.

* For a thorough discussion of Sutzkever's life and work, see her essay, "The Last Great Yiddish Poet?" (COMMENTARY, November 1983).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OBSERVATIONS

This Is Your Brain on Nanobots

Kevin Shapiro

In 1769, Wolfgang von Kempelen, a thirty-five-year-old Hungarian engineer, built the world's first chess computer—a chest-sized cabinet of gears and cogs behind which sat a wooden mannequin dressed as a Turk. After a sensational debut in 1770 at the imperial court in Vienna, where the clockwork Turk swiftly dispatched a courtier named Count Cobenzl, von Kempelen's contraption toured Europe for the next several decades. In celebrated matches, it defeated Benjamin Franklin, Catherine the Great, and Napoleon Bonaparte, among other luminaries of the age.

Of course, the Turk was a hoax; inside the cabinet, a human chessmaster controlled the turbaned dummy. Still, a mechanical man was not outside the realm of imagination in the Enlightenment era, and the mysterious automaton sparked serious debate over the promise and the limits of machines. In England, Robert Willis, who would later become a professor of applied mechanics at Cambridge, avowed his skepticism that a device like the Turk, with its paucity of movements and operations, could ever "usurp and exercise the faculties of the human mind"; chess, in his view, would remain "the province of the intellect alone." But there were also enthusiasts, like Willis's countryman Charles Babbage, who—after losing to the Turk in 1821—was inspired to design the first true mechanical computer. It was only a matter of time, Babbage reckoned, until a genuine chess-playing machine could be built.

Two centuries later, the terms of the debate over artificial intelligence (AI) remain essentially the same. Just as Babbage predicted, modern chess computers, like IBM's Deep Blue, are endowed with impressive powers of calculation. Nevertheless, skeptics of AI continue to contend that a computer's "intelligence" is not remotely humanlike and that a piece of hardware can succeed at chess only by brute force—which is to say, by generating and evaluating billions of possible board positions at every move.

For their part, AI enthusiasts point out that, only a few years ago, the skeptics doubted that even this was possible. Moreover, today's most powerful computers are less expensive and more flexible than Deep Blue, with improved software algorithms that recognize patterns rather than relying on overwhelming calculative might. For the enthusiasts, a machine capable of matching the computational ability of the human mind is just over the horizon.

RAY KURZWEIL is perhaps today's foremost enthusiast. An inventor of reading machines, flat-bed scanners, music synthesizers, and speech-recognition software, among other bits of technological wizardry, Kurzweil is also known as an unabashed futurist and an animated proponent of artificial intelligence. In his first book, *The Age of Intelligent Machines* (1990), he predicted that a computer would defeat the world's chess champion by 1998. (In fact, Deep Blue defeated Garry Kasparov in 1997, a year ahead of schedule.) In a sequel, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (1998), Kurzweil envisioned a not-too-distant age in which man and machine would become more and more alike. He prognosticated that computers

KEVIN SHAPIRO *is a research fellow in neuroscience and a student at Harvard Medical School.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would soon be wired into our bodies and brains, and that many of our interactions would take place in a domain of virtual reality, where it would be nearly impossible to distinguish human intelligence from its artificial counterpart.

Now, in *The Singularity Is Near*,* Kurzweil follows this line of thought to what he takes to be its logical end. As computers grow more and more powerful, he argues, artificial intelligence will not only surpass biological intelligence but will actually absorb it. Human civilization will be superseded by a hybrid civilization of men and computers; we will freely upload and download ideas, thoughts, and personalities, expanding our creative and scientific knowledge beyond currently imaginable limits. As time progresses, we will discard our organic habits and become beings of pure information, eventually saturating the entire universe with disembodied intelligence. Kurzweil calls this new paradigm the Singularity, and goes so far as to predict that it will be upon us within a few decades—around 2045, to be precise.

If this seems an impossibly brief time frame for such a radical transformation, Kurzweil responds that we have not absorbed the remarkably rapid pace of technological advance. In the first five chapters of *The Singularity Is Near*, he explains exactly how and when we will achieve the knowledge we need to attain the Singularity. In the last four chapters and epilogue, he explores the moral and philosophical ramifications of this sublime event, doing his best to calm the doubts of technophobes and more dismal prophets.

ACCORDING TO Kurzweil, what makes the Singularity inevitable is something he calls the Law of Accelerating Returns. Many of us are familiar with Moore's Law, the famous—and so far accurate—prediction by Gordon Moore, the chairman of Intel, that computer-chip power per unit of cost would double about every twelve months. In Kurzweil's view, this is merely one example of a much broader principle that applies to every mode of technology, from computer power and Internet bandwidth to DNA sequencing and brain scanning. All of these, he claims, are becoming exponentially more powerful (and cheaper) by the year.

Moreover, these trends will not be checked by the constraints of current technological know-how. The Law of Accelerating Returns guarantees that when refinements to a particular innovation, like the integrated circuit, begin to run up against physical and technical constraints, a new paradigm will emerge to continue the trend of exponential improvement. The integrated circuit itself replaced the transistor, which replaced the vacuum tube as the basic unit of computing; it will be replaced in turn by something else—a three-dimensional circuit, perhaps, or a DNA-based computer, or even a quantum device that performs calculations based on the properties of subatomic particles.

Practically speaking, the Law of Accelerating Returns means that we will soon have hardware with computational capacity that equals or exceeds that of the human brain. In fact, Kurzweil estimates that this will be available to consumers for about $1,000 by the year 2020, and he is confident we will not stop there. By about 2045—the projected date of the Singularity—$1,000 worth of computing power will generate about a billion times more intelligence per year than every human being alive today. We will have long since advanced beyond the prosaic laptop; computers will be integrated into our furniture, our clothing, our bodies, and our brains.

But hardware alone will not be enough to drive the Singularity. Even today's extraordinarily powerful machines have a difficult time performing some simple tasks, like recognizing an object wherever it happens to be located. This is not because they lack the computational resources, but because the software for computer vision, which derives largely from our understanding of how the brain sees, is still crude and immature.

Not to worry, says Kurzweil—the project of reverse-engineering the human brain is well under way, and should be complete by around 2029. Already, neuroscientists have constructed detailed models of brain regions as diverse as the auditory system, the cerebellum (which is responsible for fine motor coordination), and the hippocampus (which is thought to be important for memory). With improvements in the resolution of brain-imaging technologies, we will, Kurzweil imagines, be able to spy on the activity of individual brain cells without disturbing them. From there it is only a short step to reconstructing their patterns of information processing. Once that can be accomplished, we will have the tools necessary to create software that thinks just as the human brain does, if not better.

On another front, we are beginning to experiment with the integration of computer chips into neural networks. In fact, some of these ventures have already yielded fruit: cochlear implants send electrical impulses representing sound waves directly into the brains of the deaf, effectively replacing a damaged auditory nerve. Along similar lines, writes Kurzweil, we can envision retinal implants that will beam images into the mind's eye, and eventually nanobots—tiny, cell-sized computers—that will sit within the blood vessels of our brains, augmenting our thoughts and broadcasting them to a global Internet. Our nanobot-enhanced brains will be integrated seamlessly into a network of intelligence that is more artificial than biological, and human

* Viking, 672 pp., $29.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nature as we know it today will persist mostly as a historical legacy.

THESE, THEN, are the ingredients of the Singularity. First, computers with hardware vastly more efficient than the sloppy, error-ridden, decay-prone bundles of goo inside our skulls. Second, software that emulates the workings of the human mind, and in due course improves upon them. When these two ingredients are combined, the stage will be set for a radical and explosive reconfiguration of human life.

Kurzweil writes that the road to the Singularity—short though it may be—will run through three overlapping revolutions. We are already in the early stages of the first revolution, that of genetics and biotechnology, which will enable us to conquer disease and reprogram our bodies in anticipation of upcoming immortality.

But this is only the beginning. As Kurzweil sees it, biomedical tinkering will give way to nanotechnology. Just as nanobots will inhabit our brains, so too will they replace our blood cells, digestive systems, and virtually every other organ in our bodies. Self-replicating nanobot factories will also herald an end to poverty and the scarcity of resources, since they will be able to fabricate any desired object almost literally out of thin air. Once nanotechnology is mature enough, we will even replace our permanent bodies with custom-made avatars, changing our physical incarnation just as we might change clothes to suit our mood and the occasion.

The final step to the Singularity will be a revolution in robotics, which is to say, the creation of artificial intelligence that can outperform human intelligence. It becomes difficult even to envision the capabilities of this kind of "strong" AI, but Kurzweil writes that once it is achieved, there will be no limit to the expansion of a man-machine civilization. We will begin to utilize the information-processing abilities inherent in ordinary matter, from rocks to galaxies, until the universe itself starts to resemble an intelligent being.

The Singularity Is Near is in many ways a curious book. Formally, it is something of an awkward read: the flow of the text is encumbered by numerous sidebars, superfluous quotations, and bizarre dialogues between Kurzweil and several imagined interlocutors. The chapters themselves are filled with disjointed descriptions of recent scientific experiments and promising new technologies, which sometimes fail to distinguish the established from the speculative. More than anything else, however, one is nonplussed by Kurzweil's absolute confidence in his own predictions. Seemingly the only things that instill a modicum of uncertainty in him are those precluded by modern, pre-Singularity physics, like the possibility of altering the speed of light.

As for Kurzweil's vision of the future, in a sense it is nothing new. His so-called Singularity recalls the mid-20th-century transhumanism of the British biologist Julian Huxley, the Omega Point of the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and the noösphere of the Russian geochemist Vladimir Vernadsky. Although Kurzweil does not bother to acknowledge these philosophical predecessors, each of them predicted that human intelligence would one day transcend the limits of biology—and each did so without benefit of having witnessed the wonders of the microprocessor and the Internet.

Where *The Singularity Is Near* differs from these earlier speculations is in its detailed forecasts of the trajectory of technological development. But before taking these forecasts as certain and beginning to design our future virtual personas, it may be worth scrutinizing the basis for Kurzweil's remarkable predictions.

The Singularity Is Near is filled with graph after graph plotting developments in technology against a logarithmic ordinate, practically bludgeoning the reader with "proof" of the Law of Accelerating Returns. It is true that Kurzweil does attempt a more formal proof in an appendix (starting from some dubious axioms about "world knowledge" and "velocity of computation"), but the fact of the matter is that the Law of Accelerating Returns is not so much a law as an observation, and there is no particular reason to believe that it can be universally applied. On closer inspection, moreover, it becomes obvious that not all of the evidence adduced by Kurzweil on its behalf has been created equal.

It is one thing, for example, to demonstrate that computer processing has increased logarithmically in speed and accuracy over the past 30 years. It is quite another to draw a timeline positing a clockwork-like correspondence among such significant but disparate events as the origin of life (ca. 4 billion years ago), the divergence of humans and chimpanzees (ca. 10 million years ago), and the invention of the printing press (ca. 1450).

Some of Kurzweil's graphs, while not quite so preposterous as that, are uninterpretable. The ones plotting putative improvements in brain-imaging time and resolution are a case in point. There are numerous techniques for brain imaging in current use, each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages. Many branches of neuroscience, like the study of language and other higher cognitive functions, are not nearly mature enough to take advantage of the highest-resolution techniques. In any case, however, the advances in brain scanning have not yet translated into vastly increased knowledge about the human brain.

This is an important point, since reverse-engineering of the brain is in many ways the linchpin of Kurzweil's predictions. His claim that this project is well under way is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

based on a view of neuroscience that is astonishingly credulous—as if Kurzweil were taking at face value the boldest speculations made in press releases or in the Science section of the *New York Times*. Just because a particular neuroscientist claims to have explained an age-old enigma, like the origin of the emotions or the subtle inexactness of memory, does not mean that everyone else working in the field can fold up his tent and go home.

IS KURZWEIL'S neuro-boosterism a product more of educated over-enthusiasm than of naïveté? Unfortunately, his story is riddled with several obvious errors, conceptual and otherwise, that cast doubt on his scholarship. He claims, for instance, that pioneering work by David Hubel and Thorsten Wiesel in the 1960's showed that the brain could reorganize itself following damage or injury, as from a stroke. In fact, Hubel and Wiesel's work had nothing to do with brain damage. The two researchers are famous for having described how the visual system in kittens reorganized itself when deprived of *input*, as when the animals' eyes were sewn shut or forced surgically to squint. In fact, what they showed was that the brain is surprisingly *limited* in its ability to reorganize itself. Where the cats were concerned, once their initial wiring was laid down abnormally, it remained abnormal for the rest of their lives.

Contrary to Kurzweil's claims, we also have only the most elementary grasp of how the brain decodes sounds, stores memories, uses language, and coordinates movements. We are not even close to understanding disorders like Alzheimer's and epilepsy—indeed, we barely even know what causes them. And today's electronic neural "implants" are crude affairs: the devices that palliate Parkinson's disease simply deliver raw bursts of electrical activity to quiet the cells that generate maddening tremors and jerks. This is somewhat analogous to smacking a television set in order to improve its reception.

Nor are our extant simulations of human intelligence nearly so sophisticated as Kurzweil would have us believe. Although it is true, for example, that computers can now be programmed to read an electrocardiogram (EKG), one would be hard-pressed to find a physician who would trust his life—or anyone else's—to an automated machine. Computers can also compose music, but, aside from computer scientists, not many humans enjoy listening to it.

The tasks at which "weak" AI succeeds best are those that humans solve largely by trial and error, like finding the best way to allocate resources, or optimizing the arrangement of parts in a jet engine. But computers solve these problems in the same way humans do, although their trial-and-error cycles are much briefer. This is "intelligence" of a sort—but not the sort that most engages the interests of cognitive scientists, who are more concerned with understanding the basic mechanisms of seeing, speaking, recognizing, and remembering. When it comes to modeling the latter sort of processes, most neural networks are only a step ahead of von Kempelen's Turk: typically, what emerges is little more than a theorist's intuition of how the brain works, filtered through several layers of complicated programming.

KURZWEIL'S REPUTATION as a prognosticator rests largely on successful predictions he has made in the past. In addition to anticipating the success of Deep Blue, he is also credited with foretelling the widespread dissemination of the Internet. Prescient though these predictions may have been, they were based on observations of technology that existed at the time they were made. Chess computers were good enough to defeat reasonably skilled humans by the time Deep Thought crushed the Scottish chessmaster David Levy in 1989, and the foundations for the Internet were laid in the ARPANET program plan of 1968. To bet against Ray Kurzweil in 1990, one would have had to be an ostrich.

By contrast, the technologies that are supposed to bring about the Singularity are today either still in their infancy (like neuroscience) or confined to the realm of theory and speculation (like nanotechnology). Is there a chance they will come to fruition? Of course—though probably not as completely or as quickly as Kurzweil imagines. However large and fast our computers, we are still a long, long way from the theoretical insights that will be needed to decode the blueprints of the mind. Cornucopian nanobots are likely to be even farther off. In the real world, we are still waiting for laptop batteries that last more than a few hours and practical alternatives to fossil fuels, both of which have been promised for quite a while.

Like Kurzweil himself, who reports that he takes 250 dietary supplements a day and undergoes twelve intravenous treatments a week, some of us are also waiting for the pharmaceutical panacea that will allow us to eat whatever we like and stop old age in its tracks. But even if the biological processes at play here were well-understood, it would still take decades before effective drugs came on the market. This is only in part because of the sluggishness of the FDA approval process, much lamented by Kurzweil. More decisive is the fact that drug development is an imperfect process, and even custom-tailored chemical cures have unpredictable side effects. Consider Vioxx, which was touted as a selective inhibitor of painful inflammation but turned out also to inhibit our natural defenses against heart attacks and stroke.

Perhaps, one day, some forward thinker like Kurzweil will be among the first to replace failing organs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with permanent artificial substitutes, that is, ones that our bodies will not destroy or cover with useless fibrous tissue. For now, however, the only scientifically proven way to stay healthy is still the least technologically intensive. It consists of diet, exercise, and good sense.

FINALLY, THERE is the small matter of human nature. Kurzweil takes it for granted that the promise of increased longevity, wealth, and physical and intellectual capability will overwhelm any opposition to the total integration of man and machine. But even if it becomes technologically feasible, will we *want* to interact in virtual reality, except perhaps for purposes of entertainment? Will we wish to be permanently hooked in to a massive electronic consciousness? Psychology suggests otherwise, for reasons that have more to do with instinct than with intellect.

The virtual world posited by Kurzweil recalls the hypothetical experience machine imagined by the late philosopher Robert Nozick. This would be programmed by "super-duper neuropsychologists" to provide any sensation or experience whatsoever. As Nozick pointed out, however, if such a machine existed, most of us would not be inclined to plug into it. We are driven by our nature to interact in the real world, with our real bodies; an artificial reality—no matter how convincing—is not quite enough.

Nozick went on to argue that even if we could upgrade the experience machine into a result machine—which would transform us into whatever we desired to be and bring into being the appropriate causal results—we still would not want to plug in to it. However sophisticated the machine, it could not provide a satisfying alternative to unenhanced, unadulterated, individual human life. "What we desire," Nozick wrote, "is to live (an active verb) ourselves, in contact with reality. (And this, machines cannot do *for* us.)"

H.L. MENCKEN once quipped that physicists, who deal "habitually with objects and quantities far beyond the reach of the senses," have a peculiar tendency to

> fall into the ways of thinking of men dealing with objects and quantities that do not exist at all, e.g., theologians and metaphysicians. Thus, their speculations tend almost inevitably to depart from the field of true science, which is that of precise observation, and to become mere soaring in the empyrean.

One might make the same observation today about computer scientists, who also deal with the intangible as a matter of profession. It is perhaps no coincidence that futurists, whether of the enthusiastic or the skeptical stripe, are by and large computer scientists. They include not only Kurzweil but his frequent debating partner Bill Joy, founder of Sun Microsystems, who in recent years has gained a reputation as the Cassandra of futurist visionaries. Whatever their inclination, the essential question in their minds is not whether we will soon have nanobots and intelligent machines but how we will deal with them—whether we will be overrun by our creations, as Joy predicts, or transformed by them, as Kurzweil holds.

By contrast, neuroscientists, whose job it is to grapple with the mysteries of thought and behavior, tend to be rather more circumspect. Charles Sherrington, who pioneered modern neurophysiology early in the last century, was sanguine in his appraisal of the gulf between our understanding of biology and our understanding of psychology. As he remarked in *Man on His Nature* (1940):

> The mind is a something with such manifold variety, such fleeting changes, such countless nuances, such wealth of combinations, such heights and depths of mood, such sweeps of passion, such vistas of imagination, that the bald submission of some electrical potentials recognizable in nerve-centers as correlative to all these may seem to the special student of mind almost derisory. It is, further, more than mere lack of corresponding complexity which frustrates the comparison.

Despite the frankly extraordinary advances in brain science since Sherrington's time, this assessment remains as true today as it ever was. One can believe, in principle, that the operations of the brain are governed by physical laws, and yet still appreciate the profound depths of our ignorance about the causal links. True, research in neuroscience is growing exponentially, at least as judged by the proliferation of papers and scholarly journals. (Scientists, no less than real-estate speculators, are attracted to underdeveloped and promising areas.) And yet the Law of Accelerating Returns does not seem to apply to our basic understanding of the fundamental mysteries of cognition. If the transformation of human society depends on solving the puzzle of the human mind via reverse-engineering, then the Singularity is much farther away than Ray Kurzweil thinks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OBSERVATIONS

Journalism, Hollywood-Style

Terry Teachout

THERE HAS always been something faintly silly about Hollywood's worshipful portrayal of journalists. With the exception of such cynical comedies as Howard Hawks's *His Girl Friday* (1940), most American movies purporting to show journalism as it is take for granted the trustworthiness and good intentions of the average reporter. Not surprisingly, these films are usually the work of outsiders who know nothing about the daily workings of newspapers, magazines, or TV news divisions. Even when a branch of the media is shown as gravely flawed, as in Sidney Lumet's *Network* (1976), James Brooks's *Broadcast News* (1987) or Michael Mann's *The Insider* (1999), one need not look too hard to find the starry-eyed idealists in the woodpile, earnestly speaking truth to power.

If George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck*, a docudrama about Edward R. Murrow—the title is the catchphrase with which Murrow closed his radio and TV newscasts in the 1940's and 50's—were merely another such exercise in hagiography, it would be unworthy of consideration for other than its purely cinematic qualities. But Clooney, the latest of Hollywood's Left-liberal actors to go behind the camera and make politically oriented films of his own, has added to the mix a more telling form of idealization: in this movie, he also becomes the latest Hollywood director to make a film in which the truth about American Communism is deliberately falsified. Moreover, in a piece of bad timing, his film happens to have been released simultaneously with Bennett Miller's *Capote*, in which a serious effort is made to suggest precisely some of the inherent moral ambiguities of real-life journalism that *Good Night, and Good Luck* mostly overlooks.

WHAT THE two films have in common is the meticulous reproduction of surface appearances that is characteristic of modern-day Hollywood's efforts to evoke the past.

Good Night, and Good Luck is especially noteworthy in this regard. Handsomely shot in black-and-white, it duplicates with uncanny exactitude the on- and off-air appearance of *See It Now*, the CBS news program that Murrow hosted and co-produced between 1951 and 1957 in collaboration with Fred Friendly (played by Clooney, who also co-wrote the script). One might be looking at the same TV studio from which *See It Now* was telecast a half-century ago. Similarly, David Strathairn, who plays Murrow, flawlessly reproduces the familiar cadences of the newscaster's speech and even manages to suggest his famously saturnine good looks, despite the fact that Strathairn is far less imposing, both vocally and physically, than his model.

In *Capote*, Philip Seymour Hoffman, like Strathairn a much-admired actor, delves even more deeply into the quirky personality of his character, the celebrated writer Truman Capote (1924-1984). He, too, has the difficult task of imitating his subject's distinctive and well-remembered speaking voice, which Norman Mailer once described as "a dry little voice that seemed to issue from an unmoistened reed in his nostril." Hoffman's success in doing so without stoop-

TERRY TEACHOUT, COMMENTARY*'s regular music critic and the drama critic of the* Wall Street Journal, *is at work on a biography of Louis Armstrong. He blogs about the arts at www.terryteachout.com.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing to caricature is typical of his performance as a whole, which suggests Capote in all his complexity—and peculiarity.

Much the same can be said of the rest of *Capote*, which tells the story of the writing of *In Cold Blood*, Capote's 1966 best-seller about the 1959 murder of a Kansas farmer, Herbert Clutter, and his family. To be sure, Bennett Miller, unlike Clooney, has not gone out of his way to duplicate literally the world of which Capote wrote. The scenes set in Kansas, for example, were actually shot in Canada.[1] Still, *Capote* is both sufficiently and specifically evocative of an America far removed from the present, and the viewer willingly enters into it as if it were the real thing.

On the other hand, many of the same things might be said of any number of recent Hollywood films. To replicate the décor of a New York TV studio circa 1954, after all, requires in the end nothing more than a combination of diligent research and painstaking execution. If mere visual verisimilitude were all that mattered, then *Quiz Show* (1994), Robert Redford's sanctimonious docudrama about the TV quiz-show scandals of the 50's, would be a masterpiece. Even a piece of acting as precisely and imaginatively re-creative as Jamie Foxx's impersonation of Ray Charles in Taylor Hackford's *Ray* (2004) is vitiated by the fact that Foxx is too often called upon to do little more than spout the usual Hollywood-style clichés.

THE SCREENPLAY of *Capote*, written by Dan Futterman, departs drastically from this norm, not merely because of its avoidance of cliché but because of its emotional detachment.

Capote, for instance, is shown not as the fearless crusader beloved of filmmakers but as a hugely ambitious writer who sees the Clutter murders as little more than a heaven-sent opportunity to try out his own literary theories on the grandest possible scale. Indeed, he antagonizes Alvin Dewey, the Kansas detective in charge of the case, by assuring him upon his arrival that he "doesn't care" who killed the Clutters. To him, their mysterious deaths are the ideal subject matter for the "nonfiction novel" he has dreamed of writing, and in pursuit of that goal—which he hopes will make him rich and famous—he is prepared to do anything whatsoever.

To be sure, Capote commits no spectacular peccadilloes along the way to writing *In Cold Blood* apart from bribing a prison official, a transgression which may or may not have happened in real life (we have only his word for it). His gravest offense is to feign intimacy with the naïve Kansans who are in a position to tell him what he wants to know—and, later, with the two killers, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, to whom he misrepresents himself as a crusading journalist seeking to have their convictions overturned.

In fact, we know that Capote had no doubt of their guilt. Though he identifies himself emotionally with Smith, and assists both men in finding counsel to make their appeals, his real interest lies elsewhere: he cannot finish his book until they are executed, and once he realizes this, he abruptly breaks off contact with them. For all of his protestations of friendship, not to mention his claim that "the book I'm writing will return [Smith] to the realm of humanity," he is no more truly interested in Smith or Hickock than in Alvin Dewey (or, for that matter, the Clutters), and the coldbloodedness with which he courts their favor is presented with a candor hardly less shocking than the murders themselves.

THIS IS not to say that *Capote* offers a totally unsympathetic view of its eponymous subject. Capote is clearly tortured by the morally equivocal position in which he finds himself vis-à-vis Smith and Hickock, so much so that the resulting tension ultimately destroys him (though not before *In Cold Blood* is serialized in the *New Yorker* and becomes a best-seller). Even so, he continues to subordinate all other ethical considerations to the claims of his own unswerving ambition, and no small part of the artistic success of *Capote* derives from the fact that Bennett and Futterman never let us forget this. However fine the resulting book may have turned out to be—and the film leaves us in no doubt that it was very fine indeed—we know what Capote was willing to do to write it, and are appalled by the knowledge.

Not only is this cold-eyed detachment far removed from the partisanship of most films about journalism, but *Capote* is also largely faithful to the factual record of the writing of *In Cold Blood*. Indeed, it may be more faithful than *In Cold Blood* itself, whose claim to being (in the author's words) "a true account of a multiple murder and its consequences" has been substantially challenged in the years since its publication.[2] While Bennett and Futterman have made no attempt to indicate the extent to which *In Cold Blood* departs from the truth, their dramatization of its writing, a certain amount of compression and simplification notwithstanding, is in most relevant ways true to life.

Moreover, the movie *seems* true to life, in that the audience has no difficulty believing that the real *Capote* would have behaved more or less the same way as his on-screen counterpart. For unlike filmgoers of an earlier generation, most of us

[1] Richard Brooks's 1967 film of *In Cold Blood*, by contrast, was shot in the locations described by Capote in the book, including the house in Holcomb, Kansas, where the Clutters were murdered.

[2] For a concise but thorough summary of the numerous distortions and fictionalizations introduced by Capote, see Van Jensen's "Writing History: Capote's Novel Has Lasting Effect on Journalism" (Lawrence, Kansas *Journal-World*, April 3, 2005, available online at http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2005/apr/03/writing_history_capotes).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have by now seen too many high-profile cases of journalistic fraud to take the work of any journalist, however celebrated, at face value.

GEORGE CLOONEY, in sharp contrast to Bennett Miller, opts for the traditional pieties of on-screen journalism, which are all the more irritating because of the technical skill with which they are dished up.

Like *Capote*, *Good Night, and Good Luck* deals with a self-contained episode in the life of its subject. In 1954 Murrow and Fred Friendly devoted three episodes of *See It Now* to various aspects of the anti-Communist "witch hunt" led by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. The most widely remembered of these telecasts, aired on March 9, was (as Murrow put it) "a report on Senator McCarthy told mainly in his own words and pictures." The purpose of the program was to brand McCarthy as a purveyor of "smears" and "half-truths." In Murrow's words:

> It is necessary to investigate before legislating, but the line between investigating and persecuting is a very fine one, and the junior Senator from Wisconsin has stepped over it repeatedly. His primary achievement has been in confusing the public mind, as between internal and the external threats of Communism. . . . The actions of the junior Senator from Wisconsin have caused alarm and dismay amongst our allies abroad, and given considerable comfort to our enemies.

What was remarkable about "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" was not the critical position it took—McCarthy had already been under attack by numerous other journalists for some time—but the fact that Murrow was using *See It Now* to criticize him. It had been the long-standing policy of the news division of CBS not to editorialize on the air, and though Murrow closed his nightly radio newscast with a commentary on the day's events, these "end pieces" were kept separate from the reportage to which the remainder of the program was devoted. Similarly, *See It Now* had never before explicitly attacked a politician, or advocated political positions of its own. In doing so on this occasion, Murrow crossed a still-bright journalistic line—in prime time, and without first seeking the approval of his corporate overseers.

In *Good Night, and Good Luck*, Murrow's actions are presented not as imprudent or inappropriate but as an act of high political courage, even nobility. At the time, however, he was sharply criticized by liberals and conservatives alike for having attacked McCarthy under the guise of reporting on him, thereby abusing the power of the press. Moreover, Murrow himself was well aware of what he had done and, by all accounts, full of misgivings about it. "Is it not possible," he had written on an earlier occasion, "that . . . an infectious smile, eyes that seem remarkable for the depths of their sincerity, a cultivated air of authority, may attract huge television audiences regardless of the violence that may be done to truth or objectivity?" Those words would come back to haunt him after "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" was telecast.

MURROW'S DOUBTS, however, go unremarked in *Good Night, and Good Luck*. So does the fact that McCarthy's witch hunt, however irresponsible in practice, was at least nominally motivated by the existence of actual witches.

As is now widely acknowledged by scholars of the period—and as American intelligence officials knew at the time—the American Communist party was used by the Soviets as an intelligence apparatus through which, starting in the early 30's, Soviet spies successfully infiltrated the U.S. government. Yet with the exception of one glancing, carefully unspecific reference to Alger Hiss, the script of *Good Night, and Good Luck* takes no notice whatsoever of this well-known fact. Rather, we are invited to suppose that the activities of Hiss, Julius Rosenberg, and other Soviet agents were nothing more than a paranoid fantasy on the part of McCarthy and his supporters.

We know better, but, damningly for Clooney's project, Murrow himself did not. He had been, for example, one of the most vocal defenders of Laurence Duggan, a State Department official who committed suicide in 1948 after the House Un-American Activities Committee revealed that Whittaker Chambers, the Soviet agent who was Hiss's controller, had identified him as another agent. Decoded Soviet cables made public years later proved that Chambers was telling the truth, just as he had told the truth about Hiss.

Needless to say, Duggan goes unmentioned in *Good Night, and Good Luck*. Instead, Clooney devotes several minutes of the film to footage from another episode of *See It Now* in which McCarthy is shown interrogating Annie Lee Moss, a Pentagon employee who worked in the Signal Corps code room, a highly sensitive area. McCarthy accused Moss of having been a Communist without offering evidence to back up his claim. Murrow in turn offered this interrogation as proof of McCarthy's irresponsibility—yet, again, no mention is made in *Good Night, and Good Luck* of the fact that the Communist party's own records later proved Moss to have been a party member.

CLOONEY'S UNWILLINGNESS even to acknowledge such inconvenient facts, much less engage them, makes it impossible to take *Good Night, and Good Luck* seriously as a historically informed portrayal of McCarthy and his activities. But, then, that was not his purpose in making the film.

In reality, as Clooney has readily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

admitted, *Good Night, and Good Luck* is intended to persuade its viewers that journalists today have abdicated their responsibility to do as Murrow did.[3] As he recently told a *Washington Post* reporter:

> I'm not a journalist, I'm just an observer, but there are times when the media takes a bit of a pass at asking the tough questions. The bigger concern is when Judith Miller writes stories saying there are definitely weapons of mass destruction [in Iraq], and then the *New York Times* later apologizes because they say, "Listen, we should have asked tougher questions." That's a dangerous place to go. . . . When I was growing up, my father's argument was always, it's not just your right, it's your duty to question authority. Always.

Here, Clooney echoes the New Left mantra endlessly regurgitated by aging baby boomers longing to assuage their liberal guilt by keeping faith with the never-to-be-questioned commandments of the 60's. Presumably it has never occurred to him, or to his fellow Hollywood liberals, to question the authority by which the news media offer themselves up as sole purveyors of the truth. Hence his determination to romanticize Murrow—and, by extension, all reporters who dare to "question authority."

Despite his nagging doubts about the McCarthy broadcast, Murrow himself was given to the same romantic view of the journalist's calling. At the beginning and end of *Good Night, and Good Luck*, we see him giving a speech to the Radio-Television News Directors Association in which he declared that commercial TV had a responsibility to explain the world to its viewers:

> Let us dream to the extent of saying that on a given Sunday night the time normally occupied by Ed Sullivan is given over to a clinical survey of the state of American education, and a week or two later the time normally used by Steve Allen is devoted to a thoroughgoing study of American policy in the Middle East. Would the corporate image of their respective sponsors be damaged? Would the stockholders rise up in their wrath and complain? Would anything happen other than that a few million people would have received a little illumination on subjects that may well determine the future of this country, and therefore the future of the corporations?

Clooney offers this speech, delivered by Murrow in 1958, as the last word on the responsibilities of the journalist. But in showing it without comment, and similarly recounting the story of "A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" without any explanatory historical context, he tells us far more about his own political beliefs than about the realities of network TV news. For just as Murrow blindly defended Laurence Duggan, so did CBS News besmirch its reputation a half-century later by airing a report on President Bush's National Guard service that was shown almost immediately to have been based on forged documents—a report whose timing was clearly intended to influence the results of the 2004 presidential election.

To watch *Good Night, and Good Luck* is to ask why, in the wake of such oft-repeated fiascos, anyone in his right mind would suppose today's mainstream news media capable of making "a thoroughgoing study of American policy in the Middle East" based on anything other than the unexamined prejudices of the journalists who made it.

WHAT HAS changed since 1958, of course, is the willingness of a fast-growing number of Americans to continue taking for granted the objectivity of the news media.[4] With the emergence of such decentralized "new media" as blogs and talk radio, it is no longer necessary to settle for whatever news CBS and the *New York Times* see fit to publish. As a result, Edward R. Murrow's successors do not wield anything remotely approaching the influence they had well into the 80's and beyond, nor is it likely that they will ever do so again. And for all the unabashed nostalgia with which *Good Night, and Good Luck* portrays those long-gone days, it seems far more likely that *Capote* offers a truer picture of the skepticism with which ordinary Americans now view the reporters they once trusted to tell the truth.

[3] One suspects that Clooney also had in mind HUAC's various investigations of Communist attempts to infiltrate the U.S. film industry, it being taken for granted by the vast majority of present-day Hollywood liberals that the only villains in that particular "witch hunt" were those ex-Communists like Elia Kazan and Budd Schulberg who "named names," identifying their former compatriots—most of whom were in fact Stalinists of the deepest dye—to FBI and HUAC investigators.

[4] Significantly, *Good Night, and Good Luck* was bluntly criticized for its distortions and evasions by a handful of mainstream-media commentators, among them Jack Shafer, the press critic of *Slate*, and Stephen Hunter, the film critic of the *Washington Post*, the latter of whom wrote that the film "does a disservice to history: it suggests that McCarthy was an arbitrary sociopath disconnected from a larger issue. . . . But nothing in real life is ever that simple, and to pretend that it is has to be a lie itself. That's the truth that should be spoken to the power that Clooney represents."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books in Review

Nomads

The Jewish Century
by Yuri Slezkine
Princeton. 344 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Hillel Halkin

THE EQUATION of Jewishness with the quintessence of modernity, the central thesis of Yuri Slezkine's *The Jewish Century*, is hardly new. Neither, however, is it as old as modernity itself. If one goes back to the time of the Enlightenment and the beginnings of the industrial revolution, one finds the Jews widely regarded, by their own Europeanized intellectuals no less than by Christian society, as the epitome of backwardness. Self-imposed isolation, religious primitivism, economic and social stagnation, intellectual obscurantism—these were the attributes attached to them. A small number of them, like the Rothschilds or the Oppenheimers, had become or were becoming cosmopolitan entrepreneurs and bankers involved in changing the face of Europe. But these were assumed to be either mere throwbacks to the medieval Jewish moneylender or anomalies, atypical of the Jewish world beyond whose confines their success had propelled them.

One of the first European intellectuals to propose otherwise was the perfunctorily baptized German-Jewish poet and essayist Heinrich Heine. In an essay written after viewing a production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in London in 1838, Heine remarked:

> All Europe is catching up with the Jews. I say catching up because from the outset the Jews embodied the principle of modernity [*das moderne Prinzip*] that is now visibly unfolding among the peoples of Europe.

Heine continued, explaining himself:

> The Greeks and Romans championed the soil, the Fatherland. Subsequently, Greco-Romanized northern Europe championed the person of the chieftain, replacing the patriotism of antiquity with the vassalage and fidelity to princes of the Middle Ages. The Jews, however, championed only the law and abstract thought, as do the cosmopolitan republicans of our own age, who esteem above all neither homeland nor ruler, but law alone.

Heine's point was that in modern, capitalist Europe the individual's connection to his fellow was being defined less and less by determinants of blood and birth like tribe, polis, family, clan, guild, and social caste, and more and more by universally recognized rights and obligations that regulated all of human life. The single bureaucratic state was now the theater of operations for everyone, and everyone was an autonomous player on a vast field of interlocking relationships—economic relationships, above all—where performance was increasingly a function of private abilities, talents, and proclivities.

And because (Heine thought) the original model for a society in which a commitment to law replaced personal loyalties was the Torah and its rabbinic exposition, by whose pre-

HILLEL HALKIN *is the author most recently of* A Strange Death. *His "Sailing to Ithaca" appeared in last month's* COMMENTARY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cepts Jews had always lived, the Jew was the modern, capitalist man par excellence. The rise of families like the Oppenheimers or the Rothschilds from small-time merchants and moneylenders to international economic powers was, far from being an anomaly, an essential expression of their Jewishness. All that had changed was that the same Europe that once, in medieval times, had excluded the Jewish "shylock" as a pariah was itself now being "Judaized," so that Shylock could compete on equal terms. The Oppenheimers and Rothschilds were only the first; many more like them were sure to follow.

HEINE WAS not alone in his day in associating the Jews with the transformation of values that had turned the pre-modern world into the modern one—a transformation that would be systematically described decades later in the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies's classic *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Moses Hess, the Jewish socialist and subsequent early Zionist, expressed similar thoughts, as did Karl Marx, who in place of law substituted money as the ultimate abstraction that the Jew was devoted to. Marx's *The Jewish Question* (1843), declaring that "Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist" and that the "god of the Jews has become secularized and has become the god of the world," was to become a seminal text for the anti-Semitic European Left.

On the whole, however, late-19th- and 20th-century Jewish historiography, though it did not slight the economic and social role of the Jews in modern times, failed to follow up on Heine's aperçu. (The one important exception was the German economist Werner Sombart's *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, published in 1911 and later put to anti-Semitic purposes by the Nazis.) Perhaps this was because, as the writing of Jewish history became a more academic discipline, it also became a more cautious one. Moreover, it was a discipline largely in the hands of Jewish scholars, educated and rooted in Jewish society, whose work had both an insider's perspective and an apologetic bias.

In this perspective, Jewish life, when seen from close up, was intricate, multifaceted, and riddled with internal conflicts and contradictions, and thus hardly amenable to sweeping generalizations like Heine's. Why make, or even discuss, grandiose claims for it that would only provide more grist for the mills of the anti-Semites, who already blamed the Jews for all the ills of capitalism and modernity alike?

AS THE author of a book that begins by paraphrasing Heine with the declaration that "Modernization is about everyone becoming Jewish," Yuri Slezkine, who teaches history

Talking with Christians

Musings *of a* Jewish Theologian
DAVID NOVAK

Radical Traditions series

"David Novak's teacher and my dear friend Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was fond of saying, 'Interfaith dialogue begins with faith.' This book is further confirmation, were any needed, that Novak has taken that maxim to heart, making him a premier interlocutor for Christians who understand why Judaism matters."
— RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

"I don't know why David Novak calls these essays 'musings,' for they are far too incisive for that. . . . Even after my many years of conversation with David, reading these essays surprises me anew with his analytical sharpness, clarity of judgment, and profundity of conviction."
— ROBERT W. JENSON

ISBN 0-8028-2842-6 · 283 pages · paperback · $25.00

At your bookstore,
or call 800-253-7521
www.eerdmans.com

5064 WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO.
255 JEFFERSON AVE. S.E. / GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49503

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

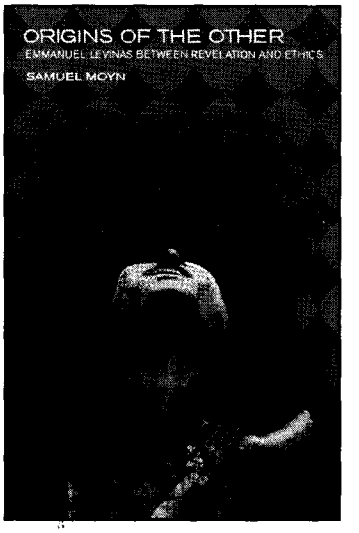
at the University of California, is therefore, one might say, the right historian at the right time. Russian born and educated, he comes to his subject, despite the Jewish grandmother that he tells us about, very much as an outsider, having had neither a Jewish upbringing nor training in Jewish history. And writing about 19th- and 20th-century Jewry at the start of the 21st century, he has returned to Heine's proposition in an era in which it is no longer a handy weapon for anti-Semites, at least of the "progressive" variety.

Not that anti-Semitism, alas, has ceased to exist. But the anti-Semitism of our global village has largely reverted to the period when the modern age began: it blames the Jews, and especially the state established by them, for being backward and tribalistic as the rest of humanity enters the age of universal man. Gemeinschaft, the comfortingly coherent community of the pre-modern past whose disappearance it was once fashionable to mourn, is today intellectually out; Gesellschaft, the fluid, open society of the post-modern present, is in. To make the case, as Slezkine does, for the Jews having been the supreme engineers of Gesellschaft is thus to pay them the highest compliment.

Slezkine does not use Tonnies's terminology, just as he does not mention Heine's *Merchant of Venice* essay. Nor, coming 150 years afterward, is he looking at quite the same things. Indeed, in equating the Jews with *das moderne Prinzip* he faces a paradox different from the one faced by Heine. The latter had to ask himself the question: how is it that the same Jews who are everywhere still mired in backwardness are also at the cutting edge of a new capitalist class that is forging the future of Europe? Slezkine, whose area of expertise is Russian history, asks a different question: how is it that the same Jews who were everywhere so prominent in the development and advance of modern capitalism became also so prominent in the great *anti*-capitalist movements of the times, and specifically of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet society it constructed? How explain that, judging by every statistical means of measurement at our disposal, the Jews, more than any other people, were the outstanding success stories of two such opposite processes?

Much of *The Jewish Century* consists of marshaling those statistics, which, though composing a picture that has been sketched many times, are impressive when presented in bulk. Take pre- and post-revolutionary Russia, for instance. On a single page (and there are many others like it), Slezkine informs us that, as recorded in different years of the late-19th and early-20th century, Jews in Odessa accounted for 57 percent of the city's factory production and 90 percent of its grain exports, and controlled most of its banks; that in Ukraine they owned one-third of all sugar mills; that in Kiev (in which the average Jew was not even allowed to reside), they composed 36.8 percent of all corporate managers; and that in St. Petersburg, where they made up a mere 2 percent of the population, they were 43 percent of all stock brokers and 37 percent of all business owners. And this, in a period when the overall Jewish situation in the Russian empire was so dire and seemingly so hopeless that 2 million Jews, most of them impoverished, were emigrating westward, largely to America.

Comes the 1917 revolution: did Jews, who comprised, as Slezkine documents, a remarkably high proportion of the Bolshevik leadership in its early years (45 percent of the Bolshevik Central Committee, 31 percent of Bolshevik delegates to the First All-Russian Congress, 40 percent of elected officials in the Red Army, 41.7 percent of the governing bureau of the Petrograd Soviet, etc.), lose out now that their



Origins of the Other

Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics

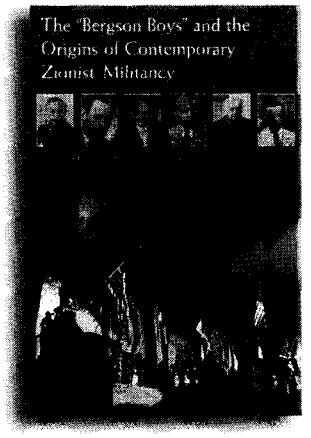
"Intellectual history at its best should heighten the philosophical drama in a thinker's work, giving us a deeper appreciation of what is genuinely at stake in it. Samuel Moyn's study of Levinas does just that. It not only helps us understand why Levinas became such a revered figure in postwar France but also reveals what that reverence obscured—in particular, Levinas's deep debt to Jewish and, surprisingly, Christian theology. All of which raises important questions about the moral legacy of biblical religion, and how modern philosophy has and hasn't confronted it."

—Mark Lilla, author of *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*

$29.95 cloth

Cornell University Press
www.cornellpress.cornell.edu
1-800-666-2211

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE "BERGSON BOYS"
AND THE ORIGINS OF
CONTEMPORARY
ZIONIST MILITANCY

Judith Tydor Baumel
Translated from the Hebrew by Dena Ordan

Tells the remarkable story of six young men and the organizations they founded that would set the stage for the militant Zionist activism of today.

Cloth $45.00s 0-8156-3063-8

THE WARRIORS

My Life as a Jewish Soviet Partisan

Harold Zissman

"Zissman's story is gripping, unusual—and he tells it well."

—John K. Roth, *author of Holocaust Politics*

A first-hand account that follows the author's precarious existence among predominantly non-Jewish partisans in Soviet Russia during WWII, where he confronted anti-Semitism while facing a common enemy.

Paper $19.95 0-8156-0839-X

To order call: 1-800-365-8929 or
Fax orders to: 1-866-536-4771

Syracuse
University Press

www.SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu

capitalist skills were no longer in demand? Not at all. Not only were they, in 1935, 38.5 percent of the "leading cadres" of the Soviet secret police, but in 1939, when they made up only 1.8 percent of the Soviet population, they were 17.1 percent of all university students in Moscow, 19 percent in Leningrad, 24.6 percent in Kharkov, and 35.6 percent in Kiev. In Leningrad, they were 69.4 percent of all dentists; 58.6 percent of all pharmacists; 45 percent of all defense lawyers; 38.6 percent of all doctors; 31.3 percent of all writers, journalists, and editors; and 24.6 percent of all musicians. They were 19.6 percent of all physicians in the entire Soviet Union and 14.1 percent of all researchers and university professors.

Indeed, until the Holocaust and the semi-official anti-Semitism that set in soon after World War II, the Jews of the socialist Soviet Union, Slezkine shows, were achievers every bit as spectacular as the Jews of the capitalist United States. Simply putting this down to inbred Jewish intelligence would be at best a partial explanation; although three times as many Jews as Russians had a Soviet high-school education in 1939, Jews were certainly not (if one may be allowed a statistical joke) three times as smart. Some other way of accounting for it must be looked for.

SLEZKINE'S WAY of doing this is to invent a terminology of his own that he then uses to link the Jews, anthropologically, with a wide range of other minorities: Indian traders in East Africa, Chinese businessmen in Indonesia, Gypsies, Irish tinkers, and even exotic groups like the Humli-Khyampa of Nepal and the Inadan of the Sahara. Resorting to ancient Greek mythology and religion, Slezkine describes all of these as "Mercurians" vis-à-vis an "Apollonian" majority in whose midst they dwelled.

Being "service nomads," he writes, these Mercurians were

> nonprimary producers specializing in the delivery of goods and services to the surrounding agricultural or pastoral populations. Their principal resource base was human, not natural. . . . They were the descendants—or predecessors—of Hermes (Mercury), the god of all those who did not herd animals, till the soil, or live by the sword; the patron of rule breakers, border crossers, and go-betweens; the protector of people who lived by their wit, art, and craft. . . . What all of Hermes' followers had in common was their mercuriality, or impermanence. In the case of nations, it meant that they were all transients and wanderers—from fully nomadic Gypsy groups, to mostly commercial communities divided into fixed brokers and traveling agents, to permanently settled populations who thought of themselves as exiles.

Hermes, writes Slezkine, "had nothing except his wit." His "big brother" Apollo, by contrast,

> possessed most things in the universe because he was the god of both livestock and agriculture. As the patron of food production, Apollo owned much of the land . . . protected sailors and warriors, and inspired true poets. He was both manly and eternally young, athletic and artistic, prophetic and dignified—the most universal of all gods and the most commonly worshiped. . . . The difference between Apollonians and Mercurians is the all-important difference between those who grow food and those who create concepts and artifacts. The Mercurians are always sober but never dignified.

In the pre-modern past, the "sober but never dignified" Jewish merchant, artisan, shopkeeper, and moneylender had made his living from the "manly" Russian, Polish, or German peasantry and ruling nobility; the two, Jews and Christians, lived side by side, joined, as "Mercurians" and "Apollonians" always

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are, by mutual need and mutual disdain. And as always, too, despite the Mercurian's mental advantages, it was the Apollonian who, being physically stronger and more numerous, "had the upper hand"—until, that is, modern times came along and "things began to change."

This, writes Slezkine, was because modernity was about

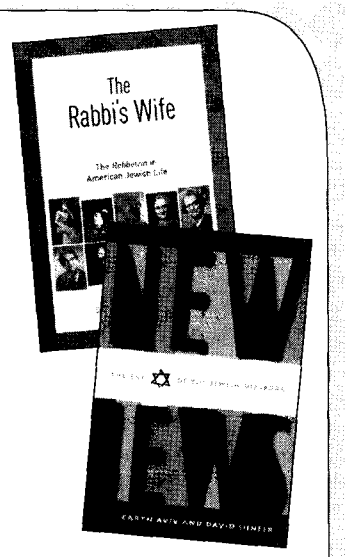
> everyone becoming a service nomad: mobile, clever, articulate, occupationally flexible, and good at being a stranger. . . . Some Apollonian groups would prove willing and able to convert to Mercurianism; others would balk, fail, or rebel. No one would remain immune, however, and no one was better at being a scriptural [i.e., educated and literate] Mercurian—and therefore "modern"—than [the original] scriptural Mercurians, old and new.

We are in a sense, then, back to Heine. The modern European Jew, Slezkine maintains, possessed not only native intelligence but a set of attitudes that, while they had helped him to survive in the medieval period, too, were of limited power in a Christian world that had exploited but not honored them and that lived by different values of its own. What modernity did was to turn "Jewish" values into general ones—not because Jews imposed their values on Christians, but because, under capitalism and socialism alike, old hierarchies collapsed, giving the advantage to whoever, like the Jews, was by habit quick and changeable enough to spot and seize new opportunities. Although modernization was about "everyone becoming Jewish," it would have taken place even had the Jews never existed. The fact that they did exist, however, gave them a running head start.

The Jewish Century revives, with intellectual sophistication and stylistic verve, an old perception of the Jew's centrality to modernity. Yet we did not need Yuri Slezkine to tell us that the Jews, when they have not been persecuted and murdered, have done extremely well in modern times under highly varied conditions, and that this must have something to do with their premodern mode of life. Why, then, has *The Jewish Century* been showered by reviewers, even those critical of aspects of it, with accolades like "daring," "original," "audacious," "provocative and brilliant," and "a bracing breath of fresh air"?

The answer, it would seem, lies in the conceptual apparatus surrounding Slezkine's "Mercurian/Apollonian" distinction. In his long opening chapter, "Mercury's Sandals," which is the book's most interesting, he indeed does a masterful job of integrating a wealth of information, culled from dozens of studies ranging as far afield as "Peddling in East Afghanistan" and "The Function of Peripatetics in Rwala Bedouin Society," in order to show how much Jews have had in common with other "Mercurians" or "service nomads" all over the world.

Of course, comparing Jewish commercial functions in pre-modern Europe with those of Chinese inhabitants of southeast Asia or of Indian settlers in Africa is also old-hat. Yet what Slezkine argues is that the traits shared by Jews with other "service nomads" extend well beyond the occupation of similar economic niches. They also include such things as distinctive religious beliefs; a sense of diaspora or exile; institutionalized feelings of superiority; endogamous marriage; social clannishness; dietary taboos and other ritual means of keeping apart from one's "Apollonian" hosts; "secret" languages, often created, as in the case of Yiddish, by introducing incomprehensible foreign vocabulary into the local, "Apollonian" tongue; high literacy rates (a necessary requirement for conducting commerce and keeping books); and "corporate kinship" arrangements, whereby family businesses expand by taking in relatives rather than



New Jews
The End of the Jewish Diaspora
Caryn S. Aviv and **David Shneer**

"**Breaking new ground,** these talented authors shake our foundational assumptions about Diaspora. Aviv and Shneer provide us with **a grand journey** and **a grand book.**"

DEBRA RENEE KAUFMAN | author of *Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women*

$20.00 Paper

The Rabbi's Wife
The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life
Shuly Rubin Schwartz

"Schwartz **adds a new and important dimension** to the history of American Judaism, to the history of American women, and to the history of American religion."

HASIA R. DINER | author of *The Jews of the United States, 1654–2000*

$35.00 Cloth • 21 illus.

NYU Press
• WWW.NYUPRESS.ORG
• 1-800-996-6987

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

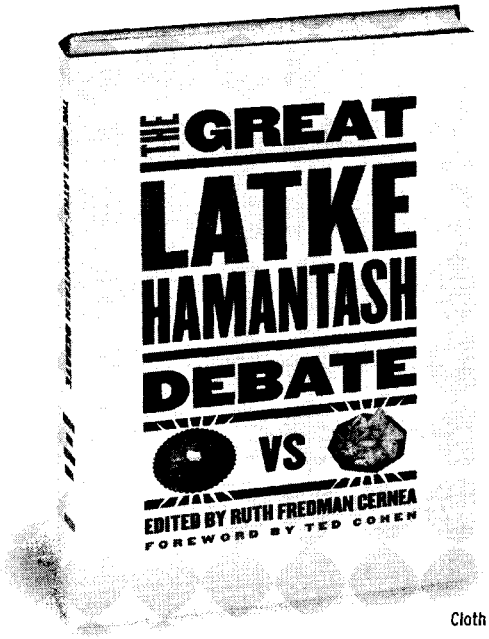
employing strangers. Seen in this light, Jewish "exceptionalism" was not very exceptional.

This raises an interesting hypothetical question. Obviously, modern European and American Jews would not have accomplished all they did, not only in commerce and the professions, but in the arts, sciences, entertainment industries, and other areas, had not Western civilization already attained high levels in these fields before the Jews entered them. Does this mean that any other developed "Mercurian" population—the overseas Chinese, for instance—would have done just as well had they had the good fortune to be, not in southeast Asia when the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution took place, but in Europe and America? Might they also then have ended up incinerated in a Holocaust, the victims of the jealousy and hatred of de-Apollonianized Apollonians? Would some of them have sought (as Slezkine describes the Zionist movement as having done) defensively to "Apollonianize" themselves, at the very moment that Europe was becoming "Mercurianized," by creating a Chinese Zionism? Would Yuri Slezkine then have written a book called *The Chinese Century*?

Although hypotheticals like this cannot really be answered, many historians, and certainly many Jews, would instinctively react to such questions by saying: "No—despite everything, the Jews have been different." But the clear implication of Slezkine's analysis is "Yes." Nothing that he says about the "Mercurianism" of the Jews gives us any reason to suppose that, substituted for them, another group of "service nomads" would not have had the same fate. In the end, if there is no need to be a Jew in order to be "Jewish," being a Jew cannot mean very much.

This is the problem with Slezkine's categories. "Apollonianism" and "Mercurianism" may explain many things, but when used as all-purpose historical tools they turn out, like all tools when applied to tasks for which they are not precisely fitted, a very roughly finished product. There is an old journalist's quip that, in order to write a good book about a foreign country, one has to spend either less than two weeks in it or more than ten years—that is, to have either an outsider's fresh but superficial impressions or an insider's detailed knowledge, since anything in between is merely confusing. *The Jewish Century* is, on its own terms, a successfully provocative work, but only because Yuri Slezkine's visit to Jewish history has been a brief one. Had he stayed any longer, he would have rightly begun to feel confused himself.

Latke or Hamantash? *Discuss.**



*with humor, intellectual panache, and heaping helpings of chutzpah

Cloth $18.00

The University of Chicago Press • www.press.uchicago.edu

Good and Plenty

The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth

by Benjamin M. Friedman

Knopf. 570 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Dan Seligman

BOOMS ARE better than busts. When the good times roll, people have more money, more options in life, more fun, higher living standards. The material case for prosperity seems incontestable. And now, it appears, there is also a moral case. Max Weber told us that good character promotes economic growth. Benjamin M. Friedman, who has taught economics at Harvard for 33 years, turns this around. He argues that growth not only relies upon morality, but also has "positive moral consequences."

What might these be? In Friedman's words: "Economic growth—

DAN SELIGMAN *is a contributing editor of* Forbes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

meaning a rising standard of living for the clear majority of citizens—more often than not fosters greater opportunity, tolerance of diversity, social mobility, commitment to fairness, and dedication to democracy." Conversely, Friedman warns, periods of economic stagnation threaten a country's "moral character"—as, in his view, moral character is threatened right now in the United States:

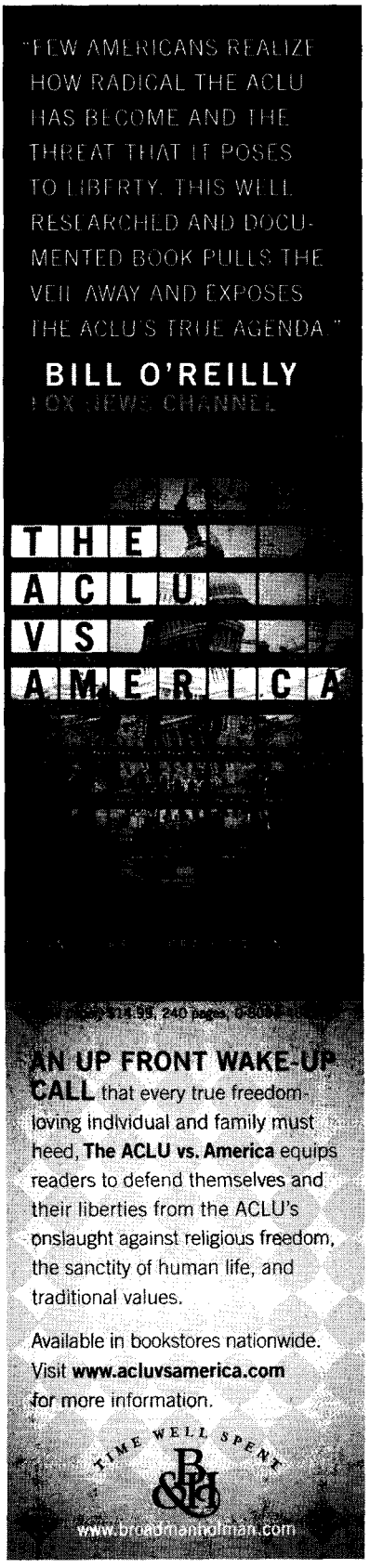
> The rising intolerance and incivility and the eroding generosity and openness that have marked important aspects of American society in the recent past have been, in significant part, a consequence of the stagnation of American middle-class standards during much of the last quarter of the 20th century.

In tackling the money-morality nexus, Friedman is venturing into a crowded field, and in one sense going against the grain. Many thinkers have emphasized the corrupting effects of wealth, and the tensions between our material interests and our moral sensibilities. Edward Everett, another Harvard sage (but in the early 19th century), argued that "palmy prosperity" was actually a threat to "public virtue." Egalitarians, who regard income inequalities as inherently immoral, worry that high growth rates in some developed countries, like the United States, appear to be associated with less equality. They tend to prefer the French-German-Scandinavian model, currently featuring far less growth but greater equality.

By calling for high levels of growth as a means to a greater "commitment to fairness," Friedman is implicitly rejecting these familiar perspectives. In an opening chapter, he offers a kind of armchair summary of his reasons. His main point here is that citizens who feel confident about their own situation will be more generous in supporting those who are less well off. But Friedman's case does not really depend on this proposition, which seems intuitively plausible if not exactly airtight. Ultimately, it rests on a massive exercise in inductive reasoning—specifically, on nine historical chapters that comprise three-quarters of his book and that present numerous examples of moral progress that appears to have been associated with economic growth.

This tour is prefaced by a chapter on the 18th-century Enlightenment thinkers who first began to conceive of morality in secular terms. Next, Friedman takes us through the moral consequences (mostly favorable) of the industrial revolution; then he offers four chapters that in effect make up an economic history of the United States; and then he serves up parallel chapters on Britain, France, Germany, and the developing world. With some exceptions, he finds both freedom and tolerance rising with the economy, and repression and bigotry on the march in times of stagnation. The book's final section, less directly relevant to the main thesis, has chapters on the problem of inequality, on the environment, and—finally and inevitably—on what needs to be done in the United States today.

Friedman has, without question, an impressive command of worldwide economic/technological history, and this book is a treasure trove of arresting details. One is reminded, for example, that L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, published in 1909, was widely understood at the time as an allegory supporting the populist free-silver program. (Dorothy's magical shoes are silver in the book, even if not in the movie.) One learns that the invention in 1856 of the Bessemer process for steelmaking suddenly made possible steamships that were far lighter, and therefore able to travel much farther. Also that steel gave men razors to shave with at home. Also that, since 1869, successive generations of Americans have ex-


"FEW AMERICANS REALIZE HOW RADICAL THE ACLU HAS BECOME AND THE THREAT THAT IT POSES TO LIBERTY. THIS WELL RESEARCHED AND DOCUMENTED BOOK PULLS THE VEIL AWAY AND EXPOSES THE ACLU'S TRUE AGENDA."
BILL O'REILLY
FOX NEWS CHANNEL
THE ACLU VS AMERICA
AN UP FRONT WAKE-UP CALL that every true freedom-loving individual and family must heed, The ACLU vs. America equips readers to defend themselves and their liberties from the ACLU's onslaught against religious freedom, the sanctity of human life, and traditional values.
Available in bookstores nationwide.
Visit www.acluvsamerica.com for more information.
TIME WELL SPENT
www.broadmanholman.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ceeded their parents' living standards by an average of 50 percent.

Such historical vignettes make for compelling reading. Yet how well does Friedman's basic proposition about the link between economic growth and morality hold up? The answer hinges in part on his, and our, definition of morality.

In his guided tour of morality as it has been conceived by great thinkers in the past, Friedman leans hard on the ethos of self-improvement propagated by the Puritans. He cites Lincoln's contention that in America, the only reason for a worker's failure to rise above wage labor would be his "dependent nature." He includes an intriguing commentary on Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. This work, Friedman reminds us, had a powerful moral subtext. In the past, national wealth had been created by war, plunder, slavery, and other forms of exploitation. Now the world had a model for creating wealth via transactions entered into voluntarily, and expected to produce advantages for both sides. For the first time in human history, national wealth creation might be an exercise in virtue.

But in later chapters, where Friedman is searching out examples of economic growth encouraging moral behavior, he tosses all this overboard. Here he makes the concept of morality largely synonymous with government intervention on behalf of the underdog—whether or not the intervention has generated a positive result. In writing about recent German history, for example, Friedman speaks enthusiastically of the German chancellor Willy Brandt's economic reforms in the early 1970's, even while conceding that many of them proved counterproductive. It does not matter, says Friedman. The issue is not whether these measures "ultimately represented optimal policy"; what is important is that "they reflected [a] political desire to achieve both a fairer and a more democratic society."

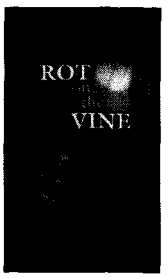
In the American context, Friedman takes morality to mean something even more narrowly defined: support for affirmative action, immigration, concern about endangered species, a belief in strong unions and in corporate social responsibility (as opposed to profit maximization). He identifies the federal welfare reforms of the mid-1990's as reverse morality, triggered by the bitterness and bigotry flowing naturally from years of stagnating wages. Friedman's unstated but obvious bottom line: morality is the liberal political agenda.

IT IS worth noting in this connection that Friedman has never made a secret of his politics. A Democratic partisan, he has often advised the party's presidential candidates. His last big book, *Day of Reckoning* (1988), was a full-bore attack on Reaganomics that got a rave review from the *New York Times* ("Every citizen ought to read it") and a blast from the *Wall Street Journal*.

Needless to say, political partisanship need not prevent a scholar from writing a convincing book with a controversial thesis. But in this instance, partisanship has clearly skewed the conclusions. Thus, the case can easily be made that egalitarian policies, by undermining the very values like thrift and independence that economic growth hinges upon, often end up injuring their intended beneficiaries and are therefore *im*moral.

When trying to prove a generality by citing examples, it would seem essential that the examples be selected according to some unbiased principle. No such principle appears in the book. Nowhere does Friedman state how much living standards must rise in order to alter the moral climate, nor is it made clear how long a rise must be sustained. Friedman's formulations sometimes assume that decades of prosperity are required, yet he also cites changes brought about in the span of a few short years. Sometimes he uses gross domestic product as his measure of growth. At other times he uses per-capita income. At yet

"A must-read for those who care about human survival"
Rev. Dr. Harry T. Cook, Author of *Christianity Beyond Creeds*



Dark faces of religion such as hypocrisy, prejudice, intolerance, and hatred are explored by a unique blend of fact and fiction — timely and provocative

"In flowing prose and dramatic presentation, these pages identify that negative portrait with extreme clarity." Paul L. Maier, Author of *Pontius Pilate* and *A Skeleton in God's Closet*

"...Disturbing, compelling, and highly recommended..." Midwest Book Review

Rot on the Vine
The Many Dark Faces of Religion
J. Stenesh
©2005, paper, 265pp., $17.95/$25.95 C
ISBN 0-9633552-2-8

COGNO PRESS
P.O. Box 1431, Portage, MI 49081-1431
Tel: (269) 343-3933 • Fax: (269) 343-3990 • E-mail: cognopress@charter.net
Available at bookstores and direct from publisher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other times, he uses the earnings of the "average worker in American business." So, in making his basic case, he creates a lot of wiggle room.

Yet even with all this flexibility, Friedman is obliged to note the existence of numerous exceptions to his rule. By far the most important—he devotes a whole chapter to it—is the Great Depression of the 1930's, when the economy was in tatters but New Deal labor laws, job programs, and welfare initiatives were judged to be scaling new heights of progressive morality. Friedman offers several possible explanations of this antithetical phenomenon, of which the likeliest reason, in his view, was the stark awfulness of the Depression experience. This, affecting people from all walks of life, and representing an unparalleled threat to the entire social structure, ultimately forced Americans to "pull together." But the Depression was equally awful, if not worse, in Germany, and the Germans did not choose progressive policies. They chose Hitler.

Another major exception cited by Friedman is from late-19th-century Germany: Bismarck's introduction, after years of economic decline, of social benefits like pensions for the elderly and infirm. Still another is Britain's repeal of the infamous Corn Laws in the 1840's; this step did wonders for ordinary working families, yet it came about as a "response to stagnation." And then there were the British electoral reforms of the mid-1880's, which broadly extended male suffrage—another example of moral deportment that followed fifteen years without significant growth.

Our current political landscape would appear to present special difficulties for Friedman. As I noted above, he regards the present period as politically regressive, and relates our supposed moral setbacks to stagnating living standards in the years from 1975 to 2000. In fact, median household income rose by 26 percent in that quarter-century, signifying rising living standards for a clear majority—and presumably passing Friedman's acid test. Nevertheless, and highlighting the wobbly nature of his criteria, he deems this increase insufficient, and attributes our present moral shortcomings to those 25 years of "stagnation."

But this brings us back to Friedman's politically self-serving definition of morality. Given his blindness to the possibility that "progressive" polices (like affirmative action) might themselves be unfair, or (like unreformed welfare) positively harmful to the underdog, is it to be wondered that so many of his historical examples fail to uphold the argument laid out, engrossingly if tendentiously, over the 570 pages of this book?

Breeding Ground

Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military

by Husain Haqqani

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
395 pp. $35.95 (hardcover), $17.95 (paperback)

Reviewed by
Alex Alexiev

Perhaps the most significant reverberations of the suicide bombings in London this past July were felt in far-off Islamabad. After it became known that three of the perpetrators were originally from Pakistan, and that two of them had recently spent time "studying" in Islamist institutions there, Pakistan's president, Pervez Musharraf, publicly admitted that he had not done much, if anything, to live up to his solemn commitment after 9/11 to curtail his country's extensive networks of hate-preaching *madrassas* and jihadist organizations. The lapse, Musharraf now explained, was the result of a lack of power; nevertheless, this time he promised to get the job done.

As peculiar as was this *mea culpa* on the part of a military dictator normally given to bravado, it may also have been to some extent sincere. But Musharraf's vacillations have had little to do with an insufficiency of power. Rather, the constraints operating on Pakistan's leader are those of a system of which he is at once prime mover and subject. To understand these constraints is to understand why, four years after 9/11, Pakistan remains a major breeding ground of Islamist fanaticism and terror.

For gaining a grasp of the situation and its implications for the United States, there may be no better place to begin than *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. As its title implies, this book is largely a study of the evolving relationship between the military and Islam from the very inception of the Pakistani state. Its author, Husain Haqqani, is a journalist and scholar now living in self-imposed exile in the United States; he brings impressive credentials to the task of analyzing his native land, including a personal acquaintanceship with many of the key military and political personalities of the past two decades.

Haqqani begins his narrative by clearing up a major misconception. Most American observers of Pakistan seem to believe that the country, if hardly democratic, was largely secular and pro-Western until 1977, when the military dictator Muhammed Zia ul-Haq came to power and began to Islamicize it. More than a few American commentators also subscribe to the "blowback" theory, according to which Pakistan's Islamic tilt is an unintended consequence of U.S.

Alex Alexiev *is vice president for research at the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

Title of Publication: Commentary. Publication No.: 125-220. Filing Date: September 28, 2005. Issue Frequency: Monthly (except combined July/August issue). No. of Issues Published Annually: 11. Annual Subscription Price: $45.00. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Editor and Managing Editor: Editor: Neal Kozodoy, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709; Managing Editor: Gary Rosen, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709. Owner: American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709 (a nonprofit membership corporation incorporated by the Legislature of the State of New York). Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. Extent and Nature of Circulation: *a.* Total No. Copies: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 32,490; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 35,291. *b.* Paid and/or Requested Circulation: (1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 22,499; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 24,811. (2) Paid In-County Subscriptions: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0. (3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 3,841; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 4,074. (4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1,687; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 1,749. *c.* Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 28,027; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 30,634. *d.* Free Distribution by Mail (samples, complimentary, and other free): (1) Outside-County: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 599; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 606. (2) In-County: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 months: 0; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0. (3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 0; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 0 *e.* Free Distribution Outside the Mail: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 690; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 690. *f.* Total Free Distribution: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1,289; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 1,296. *g.* Total Distribution: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 29,316; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 31,930. *h.* Copies Not Distributed: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 3,275; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 3,361. *i.* Total: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 32,591; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 35,291. *j.* Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 96%; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 96%. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

Gary Rosen, Managing Editor

support for the *mujahideen* we enlisted to fight against the USSR following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

But in the first three chapters of this book, which traverse Pakistani history in the decades preceding Zia's rule, Haqqani provides considerable evidence that this is a deeply mistaken view. He shows that Islam emerged as a decisive factor even before Pakistan was partitioned off from India and established as a state in 1947, despite the fact that its founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and most of his collaborators were secularists who did not envision an Islamic regime. The pre-partition election campaign waged by Jinnah's Muslim League in 1945-1946 was based almost entirely on Islamic rhetoric. In the course of it, the push to establish Pakistan became transformed, in its final stages, into a largely religious movement.

This process accelerated after 1947. The military, perceiving itself as the protector and guarantor of the nascent state, sought to elaborate an ideology that would justify its leading role. With religion the sole unifying force in an otherwise ethnically and culturally diverse country, Islam became a natural building block of that ideology, along with hatred of India, the "eternal enemy."

It was during this early period, under the successive dictators Ayub Khan and Yahia Khan, that the military consolidated its role, not only in its proper sphere of national security but also as a "supraconstitutional" authority, "the final arbiter" in the country's political affairs. As part of its self-assigned responsibilities, the military—and especially its intelligence branch, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)— began to act as a quasi-political police, infiltrating and undermining civilian political parties and covertly supporting militant Islamic ones like the extremist Jamiat-i-Islami.

The Islamists, for their part, shared the military's animus toward India, as well as its profound hostility toward civilian politicians and democratic processes. Indeed, the Islamists perceived the military as a powerful patron for their own radical agenda, which, enjoying no support outside a small fraction of the population, had otherwise no chance of being implemented on its own.

In this the Islamists bet correctly. In the ensuing years, under the tutelage of military officers—many of whom, as Haqqani shows, were themselves entirely secular—radical Islam became progressively institutionalized. Like other totalitarian ideologies based on myth, the officially promoted faith required that history be rewritten. School textbooks were produced that, as Haqqani writes, inculcated hatred of Hindus, glorified the military, and portrayed Pakistan as a "fortress of Islam."

This creeping conversion was dramatically accelerated by Zia ul-Haq, himself an Islamic zealot. During the eleven years of his rule, Pakistan underwent a final transformation from an Islamic republic to an Islamic state. Nor did Zia promote just any brand of Islam, and certainly not the more tolerant, syncretic Barelvi creed practiced by the vast majority of Pakistanis. Rather, he pushed the radical Deobandi version professed by a mere 10 percent of the population.

Under Zia's tenure, graduation certificates issued by *madrassas* were recognized as the equivalent of university diplomas, thus enabling functionally illiterate Islamists to enter the civil service in large numbers. Simultaneously, the ISI began to train and employ large numbers of Islamic jihadists as proxies in neighboring Kashmir and Afghanistan, and drastically expanded its role at home by manipulating political parties and election results and suppressing civil society.

THE SPREAD of jihadism under Zia and its consequences are well known;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the violence that afflicts Pakistan itself, and occasionally hits the rest of the world (as in the London subways), is with us to this day. What is less well-known, and is a subject into which Haqqani enters in depth, is the fact that Zia had even greater Islamist ambitions. These included establishing a Pakistani sphere of influence that would encompass "the area from Afghanistan to Turkey, including Iran and the Muslim-majority states of the Soviet Union in Central Asia," fostering "an Islamic revolutionary movement," and starting a "new era of greatness for the Muslim nations of Asia and Africa."

Zia's ambitions may have been utopian, but under Pervez Musharraf the infrastructure built by him endures, in particular the highly synergistic relationship between the generals and radical Islam. Any change, as Haqqani convincingly demonstrates, has been largely at the rhetorical level. The alliance between these two forces has done little to extricate a country mired in appalling poverty and oppression, and has been hugely detrimental to the United States. This is especially ironic because America has done so much to shape the direction of events in Pakistan—mostly, Haqqani argues, for the worse.

Haqqani's analysis of American policy, though tactful and often understated, amounts to a powerful indictment. The unending flow of U.S. aid has contributed, he writes, to Pakistan's "reluctance to accept normal relations with India," and has ultimately turned the country into what he calls "a rentier state, albeit one that lives off the rents for its strategic location." As Haqqani also shows, American largesse has not bought much in the way of leverage.

Indeed, from Pakistan's early days to the present, Washington has regularly been compelled to turn a blind eye to the egregious behavior of its "strategic ally." Whether dealing with Pakistan's genocidal fury against East Pakistan (which in 1971 would become the independent state of Bangladesh) or more recently with the nuclear proliferation that occurred on Musharraf's watch and with his full knowledge, Washington has consistently conveyed the impression that it can "learn to live with Pakistan saying one thing and doing another." The generals have been only too happy to oblige.

Like any book of broad scope, Haqqani's is not without blemishes and blank spots. One would have liked, for instance, to see some discussion of the widespread corruption within the military, including its role in the heroin trade and its growing control of the civilian economy. The increasing Islamicization of the military itself is also hardly touched upon, though it is a development full of the most troubling implications. Neither is the key role of Saudi money in bringing radical Islam to Pakistan.

Such shortcomings notwithstanding, however, this is an outstanding book on a subject that could not be more timely. Pakistan, as Haqqani shows, has been locked in a dysfunctional dynamic since its founding. Now that the United States has finally taken action to break the longstanding political stasis of the Arab world, and is pushing

ENGAGING THE UNENGAGED

The Center for Cultural Judaism
develops and supports educational programs for non-religious, cultural, and secular Jews.

We work to create compelling campus programs for culturally Jewish college students.

We congratulate the recipients of the Posen Grants who share a commitment to teaching Secular Judaism in the university and examining the secularization of Jewish life and culture:

Bard College • Dickinson College • Temple University
University at Albany • University of California - Davis
UCLA • University of Denver
University of Massachusetts - Amherst
University of Michigan • University of Miami
University of Virginia

Programs In Israel:
Tel Aviv University
Ofakim Teachers' Program at Tel Aviv University
The Interdisciplinary Center of Herzliya
Meitar College of Judaism as Culture

We invite well-established university programs and departments of Jewish Studies, History, Philosophy, Sociology or other related disciplines to apply for future grants, which are distributed annually.

THE CENTER FOR CULTURAL JUDAISM

Guidelines and information are available at 212-564-6711 or www.culturaljudaism.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for democracy throughout the Middle East, the question raised acutely by Haqqani's book is whether the Pakistani equation can somehow be altered as well. If democracy is the answer in the Middle East, why not in Pakistan?

In Living Color

Matisse the Master
by Hilary Spurling
Knopf. 544 pp. $40.00

Reviewed by
Steven C. Munson

IN THIS second volume of her biography of arguably the greatest of 20th-century painters, Hilary Spurling recounts the life of Henri Matisse from 1909, when he was in the midst of consolidating the gains of his breakthrough Fauve period, through the two world wars, to his death in his studio at Cimiez in 1954. As with her earlier volume, *The Unknown Matisse*,* this new book gives us a down-to-earth portrait of the artist and his family while faithfully rendering a bygone era in which both art and those who made it, theorized about it, and bought it were taken seriously.

In Matisse's case, most of those who took him seriously were foreigners; French critics and art lovers tended to be dismissive, if not downright hostile. One of the striking aspects of Spurling's story is the recurring role of foreign supporters, and of foreign influences, in the painter's career and artistic development. Among his key American collectors, for example, were Albert Barnes, who commissioned a huge mural—*Dance* (1933)—for his foundation outside Philadelphia, and the Cone sisters, Eta and Claribel, whose collection of Matisses is now in the Baltimore Museum of Art. Another American supporter was the painter and critic Walter Pach, who helped organize the sensational Armory Show in New York City in 1912 that introduced modern art to the American public.

Then there was Matthew Prichard, an English philosopher and academic outsider who, mystified at first by Matisse's revolutionary paintings, not long afterward became one of his most ardent champions. It was Prichard who took Matisse to an exhibition of Islamic art in Munich, a show that led the painter to spend time in southern Spain studying Islamic architecture and the patterned designs that would so profoundly influence his work. He would be introduced to still another influence—that of Russian religious icons—by the collector Sergei Shchukin, who organized a visit to Moscow that elevated Matisse to the unaccustomed status of cultural celebrity.

Another Russian, the refugee Lydia Delectorskaya, would become indispensable to Matisse throughout the last two decades of his life—especially the years in which he created his famous painted paper cutouts—serving first as housekeeper, and later as business manager, companion, and model. As a model she proved an inspiration, helping him to break out of what had amounted to a six-year painter's block in the mid-1930's. One observer left a revealing description of the artist and his muse at work:

> His incredible stress in the moment before starting his little pen sketches. Lydia told him: "Come on now, don't let yourself get so upset." His violent response: "I'm not upset. It's nerves." The atmosphere of an operating theater. . . . And Matisse drawing without a word, without the slightest sign of agitation but, within this immobility, an extreme tension.

MUCH OF the remarkable first-person detail accumulated by Spurling is a result of her having been given unique access to the Matisse Archive in Paris. Since Matisse, his daughter Marguerite, and his youngest son Pierre were all fairly prolific correspondents, their letters provide a treasure trove of information about the family's movements, thoughts, and feelings. The sense of intimacy Spurling creates is beguiling (if at times a little overwhelming), and her immersion in the records of Matisse's daily life has enabled her to produce an insightful study of his character and personality, as well as of the enormous demands these imposed on both himself and his family.

Above all, perhaps, on Amélie, his wife. Indeed, the story Spurling tells in this book is in some ultimate sense the story of a marriage—a highly successful partnership dedicated to Henri's work that ended, some 40 years after it began, in a bitter and irreparable separation. Spurling's depiction of the rise and fall of Matisse's marriage, and of his changing relations with his three children, brings home an essential point: for all of his achievements as an artist, including worldwide fame and financial success, and for all of his family's dedication to him and involvement in his work, he and they were in many respects really quite ordinary, no better or worse than other people at dealing with the vicissitudes of life.

As they grew older, Matisse's children acquired the values—a commitment to painting and to the independence of mind and spirit that this entailed—of their parents. They became tough critics, telling their father frankly what they thought of his work, especially when in their view it failed to live up to his previous standards. According to Spurling, these responses, which Matisse regarded more seriously than anybody else's, often spurred him on when he was grop-

STEVEN C. MUNSON *contributed "Inside the New MOMA" to the February 2005* COMMENTARY.

* I wrote about *The Unknown Matisse* in COMMENTARY ("Being Matisse," April 1999).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing for a new direction. But his relations with his family were complicated and often difficult. He was generous in providing support and encouragement to all kinds of people—artists, students, friends, and models. At home, in his relations with his wife and children, he was often affectionate and concerned; but he could also be peremptory, dictatorial, overbearing, and unwittingly unkind. As Spurling reports: "His wife said that, for all his good intentions, her husband had no idea when to stop."

This aspect of his personality also caused him trouble in his work. Spurling writes that "Matisse lamented the lack of natural facility that had made his entire career a relentless uphill struggle." And as Françoise Gilot put it, contrasting him in this regard with Pablo Picasso, "he was interested neither in fending off opposition, nor in competing for the favor of wayward friends. His only competition was with himself." The toll this took became acutely apparent in 1910, when, after completing two very large and stunningly colorful paintings, *Dance* (II) and *Music* (both commissioned by Sergei Shchukin), he suffered a physical and emotional breakdown.

He described his own activity of painting as requiring "a state of emotion, a sort of flirtation which ends by turning into a rape. Whose rape? A rape of myself, of a certain tenderness or weakening in face of a sympathetic object" (namely, the model). An intensity of feeling, of one kind or another but usually involving sensations of unencumbered pleasure, is indeed manifest in Matisse's work—especially in his paintings and drawings but also in his sculptures (which are often quite brutal in form). But what is not manifest is sentimentality, any traces of which he was ruthless in extinguishing from his art.

What Matisse recognized, and taught others to recognize, was the critical importance for a modern painter of finding a mode and means of artistic expression that would enable him to be true to his own sensibility and experience. In his case, this entailed responding to what might be called the sensuous aspects of the sublime—whether in the qualities of Mediterranean light, the arrangement of a still life, the pose of a model, the great art of the past, or the expressive power of color itself.

The means he developed to achieve the goal of transposing his feelings onto canvas were radical—and liberating. These included, in the summary of one critic, "flatter patterning, drawing simplified to the contours of a silhouette, larger areas and heavier saturations of unbroken color, the pictorial image more and more reduced to a single plane." His friend Maurice Sembat described encountering an example of Matisse's revolutionary approach in *Seated Nude* in 1909:

> We had come across a strange little canvas, something gripping, unheard of, frighteningly new: something that very nearly frightened its maker himself. On a harsh pink ground, flaming against dark blue shadows reminiscent of Chinese or Japanese masters, was the seated figure of a violet-colored woman. We stared at her, stupefied, astounded, all four of us, for the master himself seemed as unfamiliar as any of us with his own creation.

"You see, I wasn't just trying to paint a woman," Spurling quotes Matisse's explanation, "I wanted to paint my overall impression of the south." One can see, and feel, the variously evocative results of this aesthetic in such masterpieces as *Still Life with Blue Tablecloth* (1909), *Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Ground* (1925-26), and *Interior: Flowers and Parakeets* (1924); all three were recently on view in New York's Metropolitan Museum exhibition, *Matisse: The Fabric of Dreams, His Art and His Textiles.*

Announcing the 2006 Phillips Foundation Journalism Fellowships

Working print journalists with less than five years' experience may apply for the 2006 Phillips Foundation Journalism Fellowship Program offering $50,000 full-time, and $25,000 part-time fellowships. Winners undertake a one-year project of their choosing focusing on journalism supportive of American culture and a free society. In addition, there are separate fellowships for topics on the environment, American history, and law enforcement. Fellowships commence September 1. Must be a U.S. citizen. Application deadline: March 1.

For applications and more information, visit our website or write:
Mr. John Farley
The Phillips Foundation
One Massachusetts Avenue NW
Suite 620
Washington, DC 20001
202-250-3887 ext. 609
202-842-1420 Fax
jfarley@phillips.com
www.thephillipsfoundation.org

Deadline March 1, 2006

MOVING?

Let us know your new address so that Commentary will be there when you arrive.

CALL
1-800-829-6270

E-MAIL
service@commentarymagazine.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One can also see Matisse's genius at work in *The Blue Window* (1913) and *The Red Studio* (1911), both at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and *Studio, Quai Saint-Michel* (1916-17) at the Phillips Collection in Washington. (The latter is far more traditional than the former two in its representation of space and light, yet no less modern a picture.)

Just as he did in managing his inner demons, Matisse relied on his own stoical and determined character in dealing with the often fierce criticism his work evoked from critics and the French public alike. He felt—it is hard to say how often—misunderstood; but then, as Spurling points out, his aesthetic breakthroughs often unnerved Matisse himself. Still, he knew that he had always to keep pushing the boundary, with results that amazed even his greatest contemporaries, Picasso and Pierre Bonnard. "Matisse is a magician," said the former when he saw *Still Life with a Magnolia* (1941), "his colors are uncanny." And the latter, referring to Matisse's use of broad flat areas of color, asked, "How can you just put them down like that, and make them stick?"

IN HER preface, Spurling writes that one of her purposes in this biography has been to refute several myths about the painter's personal life that over the decades proved damaging to his reputation. One is the notion that, during World War II, "he had dealings with the Nazi regime in France." Spurling's account of the ordeals experienced by Matisse and his family from 1939 to 1945—and their courageous response—makes it clear that any such charge of collaboration is baseless.

Another persistent and popular idea has been that Matisse regularly slept with his models, enjoying an "exploitative" relationship with them. In Spurling's view, this assumption unfortunately colored the responses to the work Matisse produced in Nice in the 1920's and 30's, in particular his well-known paintings of women seated in hotel interiors and the sultry nudes—odalisques—decked out in oriental costume against richly patterned backgrounds. These were viewed by many contemporaries as lightweight and frivolous, and by others as evidence of a reactionary backsliding from Matisse's earlier revolutionary experiments. In answering this charge of self-indulgence, Spurling makes a persuasive case that Matisse's relations with his models were in fact quite chaste, pointing out, as he himself did, that he expressed his erotic feelings on canvas.

Spurling's intention in raising this issue is in part to reemphasize the aesthetic significance of certain of Matisse's works, both in themselves and in terms of his later development. But here and elsewhere she is primarily writing as a biographer, not as an art historian, and her focus is mainly on the man rather than on his oeuvre. While that is as it should be, at times Spurling gets so caught up in the ebb and flow of her subject's moods, particularly his self-doubts, that one almost forgets that, during the years in question, Matisse was becoming a big success.

What that success may have meant to him is something that is not fully explicated. At one point, Matisse said to his daughter that he wanted to leave something behind; at another, that he did not want to be forgotten. Spurling reports he asked Picasso, "What do you think they have incorporated from us?," referring to the work of the American abstract painters Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell. "And in a generation of two, who among the painters will still carry a part of us in his heart, as we do Manet and Cezanne?"

Such statements, expressions of a desire for some kind of immortality, are common enough; in this sense, too, Matisse was an ordinary man. His art, however, was anything but that. Although he did not live to know it, he was, and is, carried today in the hearts of artists—the late Richard Diebenkorn, among others, comes to mind—whose work he might very well have been pleased to see. The triumph of Hilary Spurling's masterful biography is that she conveys both the ordinary and the truly extraordinary in the life of this towering artist.

Cool Customer

The Year of Magical Thinking

by Joan Didion

Knopf. 240 pp. $23.95

Reviewed by
Sam Schulman

ON DECEMBER 25, 2003, Quintana Dunne, the twenty-five-year-old daughter of the novelist and essayist Joan Didion, was admitted into a New York hospital with an infection that sent her into life-threatening septic shock. Five days later, soon after returning from visiting Quintana at the intensive-care unit, Didion's seventy-year-old husband, the novelist John Gregory Dunne, collapsed at the dinner table and died, most likely instantaneously. The two had been married for 40 years. The death came as a complete shock to Didion—although it soon emerged that Dunne had been aware of the deteriorated condition of his main coronary artery for years.

Over the ensuing twelve months, Didion also lived through her daughter's continuing health crisis. Quintana was kept alive in a coma for three weeks ("we still don't know which way this is going," a doctor told her mother). Recovering well enough to speak at a memorial ser-

SAM SCHULMAN *reviewed Camille Paglia's* Break, Blow, Burn *in the July-August* COMMENTARY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vice for her father in March 2004, she soon flew with her husband to California, only to collapse as she left the plane in Los Angeles. Her life was saved—just—by emergency neurosurgery at UCLA Medical Center. Quintana spent months recovering; her mother was at her side, not merely fretting but thoroughly educating herself about her daughter's treatment and about the people helping her. In contrast with her inability to help her husband, she put this research to use in overseeing her daughter's care.

The "year" in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Didion's greatly acclaimed new memoir, extends to the anniversary of the death of John Gregory Dunne on December 30, 2004. Didion's tale of what happened in that period is interwoven with her memories of her husband, her attempt to grasp the fact of his death and of her new solitude, and her investigation of the "literature of grief." Unmentioned in these pages is the fact that, after the book was completed but months before its publication, Quintana Dunne also died. Thanks to the publicity surrounding the release of *The Year of Magical Thinking*, no reader can be unaware of this fact; but, for the duration of the book, Didion herself seems not to be. Her authorial decision to remain, as it were, ignorant of her daughter's death creates a curious sense of disorientation—and also, inevitably, greater sympathy for an author who, the reader knows, is soon to become doubly bereaved.

This effect, one begins to suspect, is a calculated one. Joan Didion's best writing has always been dependent on the presence of her own self, observing what she describes, observing herself describing it. When she is not present—as in her fiction and in her political writing (where she tries to understand the world without mediation through her personality)—she falls radically short. *The Year of Magical Thinking* is one of her best pieces of writing, but it partakes of some of the same deep flaws that beset her abundant worst.

At its most successful, *The Year of Magical Thinking* is a dramatic and often funny portrait of the marriage of two productive and highly individual writers, both of them novelists, journalists, and screenwriters. Their life together began in the early 1960's—Didion was married in a dress she bought on the day John F. Kennedy was shot—and, through the decades, retained much of the style and spirit of that time. "In fact I had no idea how to be a wife," Didion writes in her characteristic now-look-at-me-looking-at-myself manner. "In those first years I would pin daisies in my hair, trying for a 'bride' effect. Later I had matching gingham skirts made for me and Quintana, trying for 'young mother.' . . . [B]oth John and I were improvising, flying blind."

In this book, however, the approved cultural style of the 1960's—improvisational, unconnected to the past—is seen to pervade not only the Dunne's marriage but the portrait of Quintana as a small child, and who in Didion's recollection remains most vivid *as* a child; the grown, married Quintana seems to have made a rather smaller impression on her mother. And no less in evidence is the approved political style of the 1960's: the cool, knowing, anti-establishment stance that also informs Dunne's and Didion's essays and other books. Reporting here as a journalist, as an investigator, Didion can sound as if she has been transported back to a press conference, listening not to a doctor speaking about her own critically ill child but to Robert McNamara or Melvin Laird or some other self-evidently mendacious official from the Johnson or Nixon administration.

In such a setting, Didion is quick to let us know that she hasn't been taken in for a moment. Has Eli Lilly, for instance, manufactured a new drug, available to people in critical condition from sepsis, which increases the chances of survival from 56 percent to 69 percent? To Didion, translating corporation-speak for the benefit of the naive, what this means is that Quintana has been reduced to part of the "sepsis market." More broadly, quoting the psychiatrist Melanie Klein on the ability of a mourner to overcome grief as a sick person works through to recovery, Didion darkly pounces: "Notice the stress on 'overcoming' it." Didion is nobody's fool, and no authority figure is going to sugarcoat her reality.

Such are the intellectual tools that Didion brings to what she judges to be her central task in this book—not so much to memorialize a husband and a marriage, or to honor a child, as to examine *herself* in the situation into which Dunne's death thrust her. The impulse to write the book began, she tells us, with four lines that she typed a few days after he died:

> *Life changes fast.*
> *Life changes in the instant.*
> *You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.*
> *The question of self-pity.*

She finds these lines interesting. Many readers will regard the first three as universal commonplaces, and the last one as odd. But the last is the important one.

In Didion's lexicon, "magical thinking," as in the title of her book, is a term of disparagement. It refers to the ordinary, superstitious ways in which, for instance, she catches herself thinking, or acting, as if her husband might somehow be able to return from the dead. "I was thinking as small children think, as if my thoughts and wishes had the power to reverse the narrative, change the outcome." For her, this sort of thinking is to be despised precisely because it *is* childlike, or, worse, a kind of proxy for the search for transcendent or religious consola-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion. God's providence? She will have none of it. "No eye," she assures us, "is on the sparrow."

That is where self-pity comes in. Didion hates this emotion—guards against it, constantly examines herself for signs of it, and works assiduously to maintain her façade as "a cool customer" (in the words of a social worker who early on tries to look after her). Never does she question, or justify, this rather obsessive belief that self-pity is not merely disagreeable but a despicable thing.

In place of magical thinking and self-pity, Didion substitutes indignation—in particular, indignation at how ill-prepared she herself was for the experience of grief. Early in the book she makes an astonishing claim: "Given that grief remained the most general of afflictions its literature seemed remarkably spare." She may mean sparse rather than spare, but the literature of grief is neither the one nor the other, being instead ancient, distinguished, rich, and overwhelmingly copious. Didion not only ignores this richness but, to what little she claims to have located on the subject (C.S. Lewis, Thomas Mann, the callowest of Auden's poems, the plots of a few ballets), adds a tedious recounting of medical papers concerned with the symptoms and effects of grief.

What these papers prove is that grief is violent, that widows and widowers are accident-prone and unmindful of themselves and often die soon after their spouses, and that the bereaved feel—and look—raw and exposed. Having thus reduced the "literature" to the proverbial and the banal, Didion rails against it for having failed to ready her for grief's violence, for how wretched and hopeless she feels.

IT IS, indeed, a disquieting experience to lose control of one's own emotions. This may be why Didion, feeling victimized and bent on fingering the culprit, almost reflexively seizes upon the same habits of mind that have served her so poorly in understanding politics and history. Thus, at a New York Public Library lecture a few years ago, later published as an article, Didion clued in her audience to the true, i.e., hidden meaning of the 9/11 attacks: namely, that thanks to them, some elected American officials had been able to "locate certain upside aspects." She was referring to the post-9/11 upsurge of patriotic feeling, suspect in itself and soon to be exploited by those same officials to advance such dark causes as prohibiting flag-burning, encouraging school prayer, or supporting the existence of the state of Israel.

Is it inappropriate to point out that her estimation of the literature of grief is similar to her estimation of the response to the September 11 attacks? In both, she wants us to see, a terrible event has been "made manageable, reduced to the sentimental, to protective talismans, totems, garlands of garlic, repeated pieties"—in short, to a kind of magical thinking that, for her, is comparable in destructiveness to the events themselves.

There is an element of paranoia in this view of reality, complemented by equal amounts of melodrama and megalomania. Sinister conspiracies on the part of the powerful, often based, in Didion's words, on a "belligerent idealization of historical ignorance," are everywhere, and she alone has the wit, the determination, and the boldness to see through them. That others cannot or will not grasp the degree of their own delusion is just another sign of how "certain circles"—in New York and Washington in the case of 9/11, in the medical-pharmaceutical-psychoanalytic complex in the case of mourning—are manipulating their thoughts.

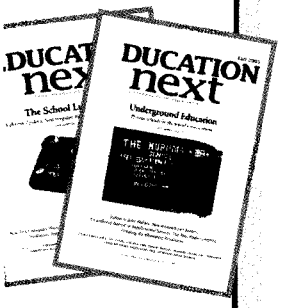
The Year of Magical Thinking ends with a very-quickly-arrived-at moment of acceptance: "I also know that . . . there comes a point at which we must relinquish the dead, let them go, keep them dead. Let them become the photograph on the table." As a cliché, this could have come straight out of the writings of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, of whom there is mercifully no mention in this book but whose simplistic scheme of the stages of grief have been faithfully if unwittingly enacted by Didion. Instead, she buttresses her apparently hard-won insight with a quotation from *Western Attitudes Toward Death* by the once more fashionable Phillipe Ariès, who seems to be on her wavelength: "A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty. But"—watch out for the grief police—"*one no longer has the right to say so aloud*" (emphasis added).

The irony is that, for this and similar tidbits, our flinty explorer has been rewarded with near-adulation by the critics, gushes of sympathy and, dare one say it, pity by the feature writers, and a lightning climb to the top of the best-seller lists. One waits, no doubt in vain, for her withering dismissal of so unregenerate a show of persistent human delusion, so cunningly and yet so successfully solicited.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cutting-Edge Commentary on K–12 Education

DUCATION
NEXT
OURNAL OF OPINION
AND RESEARCH



SUBSCRIBE
Receive four quarterly
sues at the rate of $20.

FREE ISSUE
eceive a complimentary
e of the latest Education
ext without obligation.

800.935.2882 or visit
w.educationnext.org

In the new issue of *Education Next*

"Acting White"

The social price paid by the best and brightest minority students

"Acting white" was once a label used by scholars to characterize academically inclined, but allegedly snobbish, minority students who were shunned by their peers. Now that it has entered the national consciousness—perhaps even its conscience—the term has become a slippery, contentious phrase whose meaning is open to many interpretations. What I mean by acting white is a set of social interactions in which minority adolescents who get good grades in school enjoy less social popularity among their same-race peers than white students who do equally well academically. For the small percentage of black and Hispanic students who attend private school, however, I find no evidence of a trade-off between popularity and achievement. Most studies of academic achievement find little or no benefit of attending a private school for whites but quite large benefits for African Americans. It may be that blacks attending private schools have quite a different peer group.

—Roland G. Fryer

Advanced Placement Turns Fifty

An elite program designed in anticipation of cold war needs

The idea for the Advanced Placement (AP) exam emerged from elite colleges, prep schools, and high schools as a way of accelerating and fortifying the education of the nation's future leaders in anticipation of cold war national-security demands. A half-century later, the cold war over, the AP program is still with us. The essentials remain the same: high-school students take college-level courses, taught by teachers in their schools, and then take exams designed by the College Board to show they have mastered the subject at college-level proficiency. But despite the vast expansion of the number of students taking AP courses and exams since 1956, it is still the case that less than 10 percent of all those entering high school ever pass an AP examination.

—Andrew Mollison

To read more, call 800.935.2882 for a free copy of the latest issue.

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

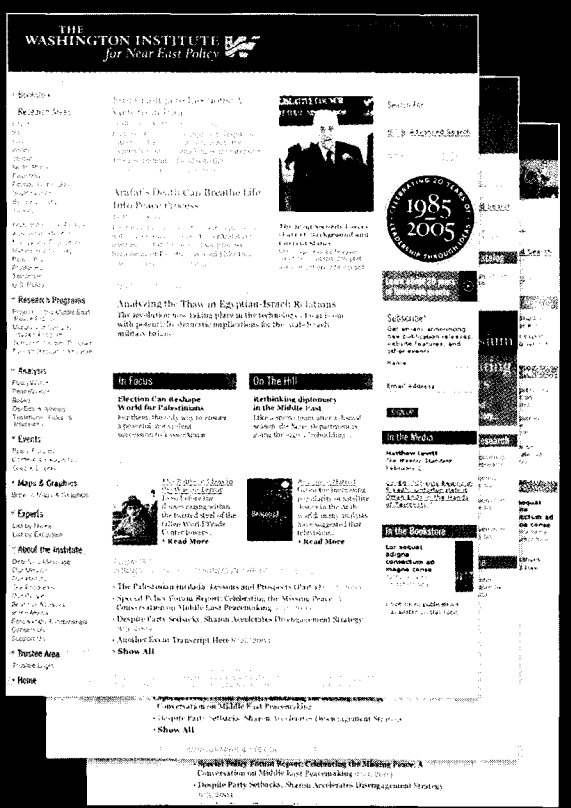
HOOVER INSTITUTION

. . . ideas defining a free society

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Stanford California 94305-6010 Toll-free: 877.466.8374 Fax: 650.723.1687 info@hoover.stanford.edu www.hoover.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Introducing a new way to keep pace with a changing world...



For the past 20 years, The Washington Institute has been one of the best-kept secrets in our nation's capital. By providing information, analysis, and ideas to the Middle East policymaking community, the Institute has helped a generation of officials, journalists, and diplomats to unlock the complexities of a vital yet volatile region. Now that Middle East issues are at the heart of our nation's foreign policy debate, it's time for us to "break out of the Beltway" and contribute to the growing national–and international–dialogue on U.S. Middle East policy.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF 1985 2005 LEADERSHIP THROUGH IDEAS

...OUR NEW WEBSITE. BE INFORMED. BECOME AN INSID...

- Get daily insights from our experts
- Browse our latest research
- Search [illegible]

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE for Near East Policy

WWW.WASH...

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED